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ABSTRACT

The Qualitative Studies section of the Proceedings contains the following 14 papers: "Disabling or Enabling? Reading Bodies, Technologies, and the Borg of Star Trek" (Mia Consalvo); "Inverted Pyramids Versus Hypertexts: A Qualitative Study of Readers' Responses to Competing Narrative Forms" (Robert Huesca, Brenda Dervin, John Burwell, Denise Drake, Ron Nirenberg, Robin Smith, and Nicholas Yeager); "Critical Theories and Cultural Studies in Mass Communication" (Les Switzer, John McNamara, and Michael Ryan); "Source Diversity after the Telecommunications Act of 1996: Media Oligarchs Begin to Colonize Cyberspace" (Jeffrey Layne Blevins); "'Explore Your World': The Strange and Familiar Worlds of Discovery Channel's Nature Programming" (David Pierson); "'Ally McBeal' vs. Hollywood's Male Gaze--Round One" (Brenda Cooper); "The American Girl Dolls: Constructing American Girlhood through Representation and Identity" (Carolina Acosta-Alzuru); "Mediatized Politics: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the 'New York Times'' Editorials on the Clinton-Lewinsky Affair" (Young Min); "Struggle and Consent: African American Press Reception of 'Gone with the Wind'" (James F. Tracy); "American Journalism vs. the Poor, a Research Review and Analysis" (Paula Reynolds Eblacas); "The Virtual 'Good Neighborhood': Tracking the Role of Communication in Residential Segregation" (Eleanor M. Novek); "Red-baiting, Regulation and the Broadcast Industry: A Revisionist History of the 'Blue Book'" (Chad Dell); "Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: A Critique of Criteria for Letters-to-the-Editor" (Karin Wahl-Jorgensen); and "Reflecting the American Dream: Walker Evans on 1930s Advertising" (Bonnie Brennen). (RS)

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DISABLING OR ENABLING? READING BODIES, TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE BORG OF STAR TREK

A paper presented to the
Qualitative Studies Division
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
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Abstract: This paper examines one popular representation of cyborgs—the Borg of *Star Trek*—using cybertheory and disability theory to better understand current cultural beliefs about bodies and technologies. The paper argues that the Borg challenge many dualisms we have constructed. The Borg both challenge and reinforce the notion of a mind/body split. The Borg reflect many of our own myths about our bodies—that we can easily control them, and rework them to suit ourselves. The Borg also give us a false vision of a triumph over nature, but with the cost of a loss of aesthetics as well as a loss of control of technology that has been implanted inside us.

Disabling or Enabling?
Reading Bodies, Technologies, and the Borg of *Star Trek*

"[The Borg] took everything I was; they used me to kill, and to destroy and I couldn't stop them. I should have been able to stop them, I tried. I tried so hard, but I wasn't strong enough, I wasn't good enough. I should have been able to stop them."
–Captain Picard in "Family" from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*

The fictional cybernetic species the Borg of *Star Trek* present a fascinating puzzle. They are the ultimate villains yet they are extremely popular, first appearing in the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, then getting a feature role in the film *First Contact* and most recently spawning a regular character—the ex-Borg Seven of Nine—in the current series *Star Trek: Voyager*. The Borg have managed to integrate technology into their organic bodies, to such an extent that they cannot exist without it. Additionally, the Borg are a collective society, where Borg drones do not register as individuals—they are part of a group mind, which controls each drone's actions. This species was originally interested in acquiring new technology, but in later *Star Trek* developments, their chief priority became "assimilating" unwitting individuals into their collective. This process, they believed, would bring them closer to perfection, defined as a harmony of infinite voices functioning as one.

The most relevant way to examine the Borg is through engaging with cybertheory. This body of work, best know through the writings of Donna Haraway (1991), explores the intersection of bodies and technologies or bodies and machines. Some cybertheorists explore popular depictions of cyborgs

(Springer, 1996), others posit that we are all cyborgs as we now live in a world reliant on communications technologies (Stone, 1996), and additional theorists explore related facets of contemporary cyborgs such as the continuing gendered nature of cyborgs (Balsamo, 1996). Cybertheory therefore provides a suitable beginning point for exploring the Borg. However, as much as cybertheory investigates relations between bodies and technologies, much if not most of this work takes as a given the normally functioning body. This is an odd stance to take, especially considering the many popular representations of cyborgs that depict a human being "rebuilt" through advanced technology after a catastrophic injury, or actual death. I believe cyborgs have much to say about what we believe to be normally functioning bodies, what are the limits of "repairing" or restoring this body, and what role we feel technology should play in the future as concerns our bodies. To properly begin to address these concerns, I argue that cybertheory should be aligned with disability and body theory. That is one of the central functions of this paper.

The Borg, at first glance, would appear to have little to do with disability or the disabled body. The literal disability experience does not figure into Borg existence, as such. Borg drones are able to regenerate, and thus repair or heal themselves if they are injured or damaged. Severely damaged drones are reabsorbed back into the collective, and their raw material is presumably re-used either for energy or to create new drones. Yet, in an examination of disability as well as body theory, it is argued that disability, as well as the "normal" body are social constructs, functioning to set limits for us concerning who is allowed to exercise power, as well as how (and to whom) we decide to grant autonomy and individual rights. Theorists such as Rosemarie Garland Thomson (1997), Susan Wendell (1996) and Nancy Mairs (1996) all argue that our current conceptualizations of the body hide ableist assumptions that are ultimately damaging to us all. In many ways, the Borg speak to these concerns. Their cyborg bodies speak to our desires to control our bodies as well as nature, and perpetuate the myth that we can control our bodies and therefore our lives. The Borg force us to confront what role we feel technology should play within the body, and the limits of these incursions. Finally, the collective nature of the Borg is a powerful challenge to ideas of American liberal individualism, which is ultimately based on a belief in personal advancement, brought about by individual strength and determination, aided by a strong, supple body. The Borg therefore offer many opportunities to examine our conflicted relations to technology, the body, and dis/ability. This research project explores these concerns.

This paper intends, therefore, to be a contribution to disability and body theory, and also attempts to integrate aspects of these theories with cybertheory. To conduct this research, I textually analyzed all appearances of the Borg from the seven seasons of *The Next Generation*, the first four seasons of *Voyager*, and the film *First Contact*. I believe, as Stuart Hall (1982) does, that in examining a text, exploring the language used and not used, the stories told and suppressed, finding the ideologies embedded within and perpetuated by the text, we gain a better understanding of our current social and cultural system, which is ultimately responsible for the production and reproduction of these particular images. The polysemous nature of the language in the text allowed for—at times—multiple, sometimes contradictory understandings of the text. I believe that these contradictions and multiple layers of meaning are central to the text, and must be acknowledged. This paper explores these multiple meanings.

This paper is divided into three sections, examining different aspects of the relations between bodies and technologies. These sections use different starting points from disability and body theory as ways to examine the Borg and how they comment on our own lives—as they are now and how we would like them and also never want them to be. The three themes employed are: alienation from the body, the myth of control, and the American ideal of liberal individualism. Each of these themes, elaborated on by disability theorists, provide fruitful entry points to studying the Borg.

Alienation from the body

Nancy Mairs (1996) argues that we cannot conceptualize the body as a thing apart from our selves. Mairs writes, "I am in every way, in my dreams as in my waking, the creature of my biochemistry. The body alone conceptualizes the body, conferring upon it, among other dubious endowments, a "mind" (p. 42). Yet for the Borg, there is no individual self inhabiting an individual body. A drone's body *is* just a thing, to be repaired or healed, or if damaged too extensively, discarded. For the Borg, bodies are expendable—they are the raw material of the collective, and nothing more—organic as well as inorganic parts, they will never add up to what constitutes the whole. This represents an alienation from the body. Susan Wendell (1996) contends that this alienation from the body is a process we ourselves engage in daily, and is a process that is becoming ever more widespread. We are encouraged to see our bodies as things, apart from our true selves. And with this split comes the urge to perfect or idealize our bodies. We can refashion them as we would like them to be. We are encouraged to see our bodies as pliable, completely under our (read mind's) control. Wendell argues that practices such as dieting, cosmetic surgery, and compulsive exercising all give evidence that we believe we can re-form our bodies to better suit our visions of our true selves.

The Borg have taken this notion to its logical extreme. They have literally refashioned their bodies for centuries, accomplishing a fusion of organic and artificial life. When they assimilate other species, they adapt, retaining what is useful and discarding what is not. And the collective mind is truly separate from the individual bodies of the drones, who do not register as individuals. It is also learned in "Q Who" that Borg drones do not give off individual life signs, or read as individual. Thus, when scanning a Borg ship, it is impossible to know how many drones are aboard, as they do not qualify as bodies in their own right.

This alienation from the body reduces the body to matter divorced from consciousness. However, there is a further split for the Borg, the organic and the artificial. The Borg are scornful of those species that are fully organic, believing them to be weak and imperfect, lacking in "harmony and cohesion." Echoing the words of the Borg Queen, the flesh is weak. Again, the Borg express contempt for the body, and elevate the mind. The Borg are in fact true mind, as they can exist in almost (any)body. Their bodies are also truly alien, stolen from other races and species, used and discarded as needed.

With this alienation from the body comes an idealization of it (Wendell, 1996). Usually, this is expressed in aesthetic fashionings of the body, culturally constructed ideas about beauty and what constitutes attractiveness and a correspondingly preferable body. Rather than strive for aesthetically pleasing bodies, the Borg are intent on fashioning the ultimately functioning body. This body is the antithesis of an aesthetically pleasing body. Tubes and hoses sprout from any and all parts of the body. One eye is removed and an enhanced eye-piece is attached. One hand and arm are removed, and the addition of a machine-like servo-mechanism is added to the body. These enhancements are additionally terrifying to non-Borg as they cause the Borg drones to walk and move slowly, in at times an ungainly manner, as if these prostheses are very cumbersome to drag around. Yet, they are the functional apex for the Borg, and so no modifications for aesthetics are needed. These creatures are "definitely not Swedish," and resemble "bionic zombies" more than anything else, according to Lily Sloane in *First Contact*. Yet their value lies in their functionality, rather than in how they appear.

The Borg reflect how we view ourselves, on how we too are alienated from our bodies. Western cultural ideals concerning bodies valorize the aesthetic over the functional to a damaging degree. While we are a culture that believes in exercise and the well-toned body, we have conflicting and often damaging ideas about how to obtain the perfect or perfectly pleasing body. Some girls and women, in an attempt to embody our culture's ideas of attractiveness, physically alter and damage their bodies to become thin, according to Susan Bordo (1993). Anorectics starve themselves, while bulimics engage in a cycle of bingeing and purging, often causing permanent damage to their physical bodies. Clearly, functionality is not what these girls and women value (or are taught to value), instead it is the aesthetically pleasing body. Likewise, body-builders, mostly male, often engage in regimens that include the intake of damaging drugs (steroids). They may become so bulked up that they develop heart conditions and other bodily ailments, in the name of achieving some bodily ideal. While we are thus horrified with the lack of aesthetics that the Borg appear to embrace, their preference for functionality is probably more healthy in the long run, and less hypocritical.

While the Borg diverge from our own ideas about bodily ideals, they echo our belief in the value of strength. Weakness is something to be taken advantage of, to be exploited for the Borg's benefit. For example, the Borg Queen in *First Contact* tells Data after he has been captured that "finding your weakness is only a matter of time." Data cannot be assimilated as humans can, because he is fully artificial. Yet the Borg Queen is certain that he has a weakness that she can use against him. Ultimately, it turns out that his weakness is really a twist on a human weakness—flesh. While for humans their flesh provides the Borg the opportunity to assimilate them with nanoprobes, for Data, his desire for flesh (attaining humanity) is what causes him to even briefly consider joining forces with the Borg Queen.

The Borg are on a perpetual quest to better themselves and this quest also includes the eradication of weakness. This valorization of strength and contempt for weakness again goes back to cultural ideas of the preferable body. Our investment in our bodies and a "myth of control" forces us to believe in the notion that we should not need help, that strength is preferable over weakness, that weakness of the body also implies weakness of the mind (Wendell, 1996). And to be a fully functioning and successful individual in Western society, a strong body is the evidence of a strong mind. To admit to anything less is to suggest failure of the individual to fit in to society. This, too, is an alienation of the mind from the body, as the weak or imperfectly functioning body is held in contempt or up for pity, as being somehow the direct result of a correspondingly weak mind. This myth that we can fully be in control of our relative strength or weakness reveals that our minds and bodies are not fully in tune with each other—that we believe one can dictate to the other certain ways to be and act. This is also a reflection of our current alienation from our bodies.

Organic v. artificial and the myth of control

The Borg raise questions for us about the role of technology in aiding the body, and about how far we feel that integration should go. The Borg, on the surface, present a situation where technology appears to run rampant throughout the organic body without any apparent conscious control by the individual drone. The horror of this process is exploited in several situations in both *First Contact* and *Voyager*. In the opening scene of *First Contact*, Captain Picard dreams about the Borg ship where he was assimilated. He is confronted by the Borg. In horror, Picard wakes up, and goes to the bathroom to splash water on his face. While looking at his face in the mirror, something begins to move under his cheek, and a Borg implant suddenly sprouts out of his face. As he gasps in fear, he wakes up for real, as an alarm goes off indicating he has an incoming transmission from Starfleet.

In "The Raven" on *Voyager*, Seven of Nine dines in the cafeteria, eating solid food for the first time with the ship's chef and morale officer, Neelix. She has been having strange hallucinations for a few days, and has one while she is eating. She looks down and a Borg implant suddenly sprouts on her hand. She stands up, knocks over Neelix and tells him "resistance is futile." She then leaves the ship, intent on re-joining the collective. Her Borg physiology has re-asserted itself and she has regrown many of the implants the doctor previously removed. A change in attitude accompanies this physiological change. She believes a Borg ship has transmitted a homing signal for her, so she can find her way back home.

This becomes her ultimate goal, and she leaves Voyager and the crew to re-establish herself with the collective. We later find out this is not a signal from a Borg ship, but a distress call from the ship she was originally travelling in when it was attacked and she was assimilated.

These two depictions of Borg technology taking over represent our fear of the Borg's relationship with technology. Their implants are not sedentary or inert—they are dynamic and can replicate or grow independent of any organic influence. Our minds cannot control them, neither can our organic bodies. We as a society are greatly invested in a myth of control, where if we do everything right and take care of ourselves, we will be able to control our bodies (Wendell, 1996). The spontaneously sprouting Borg implants call this myth into question. The only logical solution is to question the role of the technology that developed the Borg implants. And here is where we start to fear Borg technology, as an invasive, uncontrollable force within the body.

The way the Borg are represented also bears out this belief. When drones are cut off from the collective, as Seven of Nine was, and as the colonists in "Unity" claim, their human biology begins to "re-assert itself" over the implanted Borg technology. It becomes possible to remove most implants, indeed as the Doctor in Voyager believes, it becomes necessary. Without the mediating influence of the sub-space link, body and implants become mutually incompatible and start to reject each other. The Doctor confirms this process in "The Gift" when he says in regards to Seven of Nine, "there's a battle being waged inside her body between the biological and the technological and I'm not sure which is going to win." Thus, organic bodies see the technology as foreign and seek to reject it. This process is identical to when our own bodies reject foreign tissues such as transplanted hearts. We require powerful anti-rejection drugs to keep our bodies from attacking the new organ. Borg technology provokes the same response, reading as foreign to our bodies and therefore dangerous.

Even as the body rejects the Borg implants, it is suggested that not all of the implants may be removed. As the colonists in "Unity" report, removal of the implants from their central nervous systems would have caused death. Seven of Nine, as well, still has some Borg implants and nanoprobes existing within her organic body. And she must still regenerate in her alcove for a specified period daily. While it is not specifically mentioned (actually there is some evidence to the contrary) I would argue that Picard as well must have some Borg technology (implants, nanoprobes, or otherwise) remaining within his body, otherwise he would not be able to hear the Borg as he does in *First Contact*. The Borg leave their footprint upon you, whether or not you escape. Borg technology is like an infectious agent, leaving its traces within the body. This echoes current fears about bodily infections and viruses. Even if we may someday cure people with AIDS or HIV, they will likely still be left with the antibodies to the HIV virus within their bodies. They will still be marked and will not be able to return to their original un-infected or un-marked selves. This is an uncontrollable effect of encounters with the Borg.

Our myth of controlling our individual bodies is most strongly challenged by one particular Borg technology, the sub-space link that forms the basis of the collective mind. As indicated, this is a technological development, something the Borg have created. It is not referred to as telepathy, and does not appear to have an organic basis. It is purely artificial and can be "severed" with effort. This is a synthetic link, something unnatural. It is what maintains the Borg technology within the body. Once the link is broken, rejection of the implants begins. This link, and the technology underlying it, represents all that the Borg are. Even as Seven of Nine is horrified at the loss of her Borg technology, the ultimate challenge for her is the loss of her link with the collective. Without it, she is one, alone, and she "cannot function this way" ("The Gift"). For the Borg, a similar myth to our own is operating. Drones are not supposed to be able to function on their own. They cannot survive without the voices in their heads telling them what to do. To an extent this is true, as once the link is broken, rejection of Borg implants begins. However, on another level, this claim is ideological, as it suggests the opposite of the liberal individualistic claim that the individual cannot function (at least properly or at maximum output) without the collective. The drone is inherently social, and without its continuous social contact, it will die.[1] This is not literally true, but it suggests that the Borg have their own myth of control operating, suggesting how prevalent and how desirable such ideas can be. We all, human and Borg, wish to control our bodies and our mind(s).

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[1] Strangely, this function of the implants, that the Borg body rejects them once the link has been severed, is not consistent within portrayals of the Borg. For example, Hugh was separated from the collective in

The integration of technology into the body is mandatory for Borg existence, but still optional for our own. The potential future we see in the bodies of the Borg points out to us the dangers of an unquestioning acceptance of further body-machine integration. One of our fears is that our minds will no longer be able to control these technologies. We as a society have a great investment in the myth of control, and Borg implants challenge this myth. Likewise, the markers that Borg technology leave behind within the body mimic our present concern about viral agents and our inability to completely cleanse ourselves of them. Borg technology represents much of what we fear we will become.

In Borg society, technology has a strictly functional use. Therefore, the Borg do not give us the sleek, streamlined images of cyborgs that other images in popular culture do. Their integration of technology and the body is not sexy or attractive. Why is this so? Claudia Springer (1996) has argued that film versions of cyborgs have given us idealized versions of the masculine form, ones that offer reflections on what we expect or desire masculinity to be. Thus, we have

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"I, Borg" yet his body did not immediately reject its Borg implants. Further, in Descent Parts I and II, the Borg separated from the collective did not die either, or need to remove their implants. I cannot offer an explanation for this discrepancy except to say that the examples I use, such as the colonists in the *Voyager* episode "Unity" and Seven of Nine are the latest incarnation of the Borg, and this is perhaps how the creators now wish them to be portrayed.

the overly large and muscular T101 in *The Terminator*, triumphing over the fluid, shifting T1000, which represents femininity rather than masculinity. The Borg are not so fluid, or muscular. They are covered with technology and shielding, indifferent to their appearance. They are de-formed, rather than re-formed by technology. While it is integrated into them, it does not disappear or have a subtle look. Indeed, the organic side of the Borg disappears, submitting in service to the technological side. Aesthetics of beauty have no place in the Borg hybrid of artificial and organic matter. The Borg have an aesthetic, it is simply unlike any we are used to. It is an aesthetic of efficiency, which brings ultimate harmony. For the Borg, the organic doesn't seem to matter much at all. In fact, their organic matter changes as they evolve from simply seeking technology to finding new cultures to assimilate. Now, the Borg appear more malevolent, exchanging their ghostly white visages for a mottled, gruesome countenance. The Borg are more embodied, more corporeal, but in a repugnant way. Thus, so is their threat repugnant as well.

Yet the Borg are also figures that are attractive to us, in certain ways. The Borg's relationship with technology is something that we desire as well as fear. There are several reasons for this desire. The Borg are not afraid of technology as we are; technology allows them to transcend their organic, flawed bodies; and their use of technology represents a triumph over, or controlling of, nature. These facets of Borg existence challenge us to re-examine our fears about technology and our beliefs about the body and nature.

The Borg are clearly in control of their technology, and any new technology that they acquire or assimilate. They deliberately choose which species they wish to assimilate, for their appropriate "biological and technological distinctiveness." This is not something that we can say about our own (human) relationship with technology. Even as advancements are made in science and technology, our ambivalence about using them increases. For example, although it is now possible to clone animals, all U.S. funding for research into cloning human beings has been banned. Scientists are mapping the code to the human body (the Human Genome Project) yet some are uneasy about where this new information could lead. Technology and ethics can be separated, but not for very long. However, our tendency is to develop the technology first and ask questions about it afterwards. This produces an uneasy relationship with science and technology. We are left with advancements we are unsure we really want. For the Borg, there is no ambivalence. New technology is always advancement. They choose the species they wish to assimilate in order to gain in technological or organic ways. This distinctiveness is added to them, refining them and advancing them in their quest for perfection. This represents the Borg's ability to constantly adapt, which is also tied to the use of technology. For the Borg, adaptation is a survival skill. It is demonstrated most often in relation to the Borg ability to adapt to weapons, but the Borg have this ability in many areas. They are constantly adapting to their environment, adding new technology, new information, new biological and genetic material to their mix.

This is an efficient way to survive, always bringing in new information, new technology. This is something else the Borg do better than us. They unquestioningly adapt and we continue to struggle with the ethics of new technologies and wrestle with the desire for stasis.

The Borg also represent a transcendence of the body and its limitations, exemplifying a triumph over nature. The Borg quest for perfection suggests that there is a state of perfection that can be achieved, and technology is one means to this end. As the Borg repeatedly state, the flesh is weak, the organic is insufficient by itself. The addition of technologies to the body overrides the body's natural tendencies toward weakness and imperfection. As technology is something that can be controlled, and the body is less controllable, the addition of technologies allows for a mutability of the body where it was previously unimaginable. The body is open for manipulation in a manner previously not seen. The body becomes more inconstant. It is reduced to mere matter, a raw ingredient ready for reorganization and rework. The Borg's ability to rework the flesh appeals to a society that believes the body can be manipulated and controlled, improved upon and changed. The Borg's easy ability to circumvent the limitations of the body suggest that our own bodies, too, are open for negotiation, by technology or otherwise. As suggested before, this represents an alienation of the body, and a perpetuation of the myth of control. Yet it is a tempting move to make. This move encompasses the controlling of not just the body, but of nature as well. It perpetuates not just the myth that the body can be controlled, but that nature can be controlled, and that technology and nature are somehow in opposition to one another. It preserves a false divide, a divide we continue to attach great significance to.

The loss of self and individuality

Rosemarie Thomson (1997) argues that Americans have invested much in an ideology of liberal individualism. Thomson believes that this ideology creates an American Ideal which is structured by a four-part self-concept consisting of "self-government, self-determination, autonomy, and progress" (p. 42). Each of these elements rests on the assumption of a normally functioning body, one that assimilation by the Borg would destroy or suppress.

Thomson elaborates, "egalitarian democracy demands individual self-government to avoid anarchy. A system in which individuals make laws and choose leaders depends upon individuals governing their actions and their bodies just as they govern the social body" (pp. 42-43). Bodies that fall outside of the norm challenge this notion of self-government. If one's own body cannot be controlled, how can one assume larger responsibilities for government? The disabled body, as well as the assimilated body, call this belief into question. Similarly, self-determination "requires a compliant body to secure a place in the fiercely competitive and dynamic socioeconomic realm" (p. 43). This is the belief in the "self-made man" that has been a large part of the American dream. This requirement places great pressures on individuals to assume responsibility for their own social and economic situations. Again, if they cannot determine the course their own body will take, their failure in other situations seems assured. However, even as Americans place great emphasis on self-determination and autonomy, conformity to certain established norms is also expected. As Thomson quotes Tocqueville, (writing in 1835, but still relevant today) "all of the minds of the Americans were formed upon one model, so accurately do they follow the same route" (p. 43). All of these paradoxes are played out, and exploited, in the figure of the Borg.

The most terrifying thing about the Borg is their destruction of the individual and the self.[2] As numerous characters have testified, the Borg destroy freedom of choice, and any ability to act independently of the collective mind. This alteration is worse than death for the individual involved. Picard puts it best in "Family" while talking to his brother. "They took everything I was; they used me to kill, and to destroy and I couldn't stop them. I should have been able to stop them, I tried. I tried so hard, but I wasn't strong enough, I wasn't good enough. I should have been able to stop them. I should." Picard's lament of his dis- or non-ability to fight back reveals many of the implicit assumptions about individualism in contemporary Western society.

For the Borg, self-determination (as well as self-government) is quite literally irrelevant. In the Borg collective, there is no concept of a self operating

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[2] In many situations, characters have commented that they would rather die than be assimilated. Why would they choose death over life in an altered form? Although I discuss above our investment in individuality and the self, I believe there may be another reason as well, operating under the surface. We believe that in death, our bodies cease to function, and our "true selves" either go to another plane of existence, transfer to another body, or at the least cease to be. In all these cases, the self is left intact, in some way. The Borg destroy this vision of what the self will come to be, perverting it along with the body it used to inhabit.

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within drones, only within the group mind is there a collective self. This collective self has no use for individuals that can think and act on their own. It is the antithesis of their civilization. Conformity is not only expected, it is desired. It is the state of harmony the Borg are in the process of achieving, "infinite voices functioning as one." Tocqueville argued that early republican America was characterized by forces favoring conformity and the regulation of norms. It could be suggested that such forces are even stronger today. Thus, even though the Borg represent for us a nightmare vision of the loss of individuality, reality asserts that such individuality has largely been a myth. In that way, we are not too far from the Borg conformity we so fear. In a sense, the Borg represent the ultimate achievement of conformity carried to its logical conclusion. This represents something we both fear and desire. Just as the Borg terrify us with a complete loss of individuality they also point out a limitation in our current state, where individuality is not as individual or particular as we would like to think it is. The Borg, then, could be an early warning signal about the imminent dangers awaiting us concerning the limits of individuality as well as conformity.

According to Herbert Marcuse (1978), what we know to be individuality or individualism has indeed changed over time. This is partly in response to the increasing technologization of the world and the requirement to respond rationally to it. Previously, an individual was defined as "the subject of certain fundamental standards and values which no external authority was supposed to encroach on" (p. 139). Technological progress and the development of mass production changed what it meant to be an individual. Now, individual achievement has been turned into standardized efficiency. The result is that "the efficient individual is the one whose performance is an action only insofar as it is the proper reaction to the objective requirements of the apparatus, and his [sic] liberty is confined to the selection of the most adequate means for reaching a goal which he did not set" (p. 142). Marcuse's description of the contemporary individual does not sound so different from the life of a Borg drone. Worse still, the individual in question is not supposed to question his/her fate—to do so would be utterly irrational: "all protest is senseless, and the individual who would insist on his freedom of action would become a crank. There is no personal escape from the apparatus which has mechanized and standardized the world" (p. 143). If we accept Marcuse's interpretation of individuality today, we are really very close to the Borg after all.

In addition to highlighting our fears about loss of individuality, the way the Borg assimilate a person also speaks to a great fear, the loss of bodily integrity. The Borg not only wreak havoc on the mind, but also on the body. Which is more unnerving? Returning to Thomson (1997) and disability theory of the body, we learn that:

> The disabled figure profoundly threatens this fantasy of autonomy, not so much because it is seen as helpless, but rather because it is imagined as having been altered by forces outside the self...autonomy assumes immunity to external forces along with the capacity to maintain a stable, static sense of being...physical alterations caused by time or the environment—the changes we call disability—are hostile incursions from the outside, the effects of cruel contingencies that an individual does not adequately resist.

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> Seen as victim of alien forces, the disabled figure appears not as transformed, supple, or unique but as violated (p. 45).

The Borg, in their process of assimilation, are literally dis-abling individuals if these ideas of liberal individualism are taken into account. Picard echoes the exact words Thomson uses, claiming that he did not "adequately resist" the Borg, and so felt violated in the extreme. The Borg are the quintessential force "outside the self" that destroys our belief in autonomy, as the Borg cannot be resisted. Their assimilation process includes the vampire-like injection of nanoprobes into the bloodstream, often through the neck, as well as the replacement of specific body parts with additional technology. This process, provided it can be reversed, gives the de-assimilated individual feelings of violation and a profound loss, because the belief systems operating within the individual were wiped away much more easily than our myths (or beliefs) would have led us to believe they could be. And the Borg once again do double duty here, not only assimilating our body but our mind as well. The Borg make a mockery of the mind/body split that is often perpetuated in Western thought, both with their assimilation technique and with their lived reality, the ultimate mind/body split, with bodies not even registering as having individual minds. The Borg rupture many dualisms, as Donna Haraway (1991) claimed cyborgs might or should. The Borg question our ultimate future, will it be collapsing dualisms, or the imposition of a final grid of control over our planet? The Borg could go either way.

If the Borg challenge our most deeply held beliefs, and are presented as pure evil, what is redeeming about them? What could we find desirable about their way of life? As mentioned before, while lip-service is paid to ideas of self-determination and autonomy, controls over the body and limits on individual choices are also prevalent in Western society. As Foucault (1975) has argued, power relations shape our bodies, making them culturally and historically specific, and responsive to ever-present relations of power. The ultimate goal is the creation of docile bodies that are easily controlled as well as tracked and placed in space, self-patrolling rather than needing direct guidance and coercion. If the system functions well, Foucault believes, we all do the job of correctly policing ourselves and our actions, rather than letting others do it for us. The Borg take this policing process further, and invert it. There is no fear of an ultimate power or dictator with individual quirks and whims. Instead there is a body ruled collectively with each voice having equal input. In the beginning of the fourth season of *Voyager*, Seven of Nine suffers greatly due to her separation from the collective, and demands to be released to rejoin them. Captain Janeway herself echoes back to Seven what is appealing about living in the Borg collective. "You were part of a vast consciousness. Billions of minds working together. A harmony of purpose and thought. No indecision, no doubts. The security and strength of a unified will. And you've lost that" ("The Gift"). Here, the collective nature of Borg life doesn't appear as horrific as previously imagined. And we also learn that while the Borg may not question you about your choice to be assimilated (or not), humans are not so enlightened either. In an exchange between Seven of Nine and Janeway, the limits of Starfleets' (and our own) system are evident. Janeway refuses to allow Seven to leave Voyager and rejoin the Borg, claiming she is human and needs to re-develop her individuality, which the Borg stole from her. Commenting on her fate, Seven states "you would deny us the choice. As you deny us now. You have imprisoned us in the name of humanity, yet you will not grant us your most cherished human rights—to choose our own fate. You're hypocritical, manipulative. We do not want to be what you are!" Janeway responds that "you lost the capacity to make a rational choice the moment you were assimilated. They took that from you. And until I'm convinced you've gotten it back, I'm making the choice for you. You're staying here." Seven aptly responds, "then you are no different than the Borg." Seven's response to Janeway reinforces Tocqueville's and Marcuse's comments about the uniformity of the American mind. For Janeway, Seven's choice to rejoin the collective is unimaginable. This choice is not a choice, but a result of programming from a species that would seem to resemble a cult. Seven's ability to freely choose has been compromised, and before she can be re-accorded rights within human society, she must be deprogrammed and led to renounce the pernicious ways of the Borg collective.

In exposing the limits of liberal individualism, Seven's statements suggest that humans operate on the same moral plane as the Borg. Other theorists have argued this about the Borg, suggesting that our beliefs in individualism are as dogmatic and narrow-minded as the Borg's belief in a collective society. Both believe they are saving the world from the other. In placing both systems on a level playing field, if only briefly, it becomes clear that all belief systems are relative. A collective society may be no more terrible as a lived reality than an individualist society. By making this move, the Borg world is made more accessible, more understandable, for the viewer. The viewer is invited to put aside preconceptions about life in the collective and consider it as a viable alternative. This leads to a recognition that the social could be as valuable as the individual. Borg society, the very definition of a collective or community, gives us a picture of another way of life. As Americans, we are increasingly alienated from one another. We build gated communities, sit on the back deck rather than the front porch, and increasingly move away from our relatives and childhood homes. We have become a nation of strangers, fearful of each other and lacking in the capacity to break out of this rut. The Borg, in some ways, call to us to abandon this individualistic way of living. Putting aside their conquering tendencies, the Borg live as one—all voices are equal, all work is shared. Isolation is not an option, discord is unknown. For human society struggling with increasing alienation, rage and fear, this way of life may be tempting, at least on some levels. The Borg offer another way of doing things, as we are beginning to question the success of our own methods.

Conclusions

These are some of the ways that the Borg represent ourselves, what we desire, and what we fear. The Borg challenge many dualisms. They disrupt categories, yet sometimes reinforce them as well. As Haraway argues, that is the function of cyborgs. The Borg both challenge and reinforce the notion of a mind/body split, as they further challenge us to reconceptualize our ideas about bodies and technologies, and where we see acceptable incursions and where we do not. The Borg reflect many of our own myths about our bodies—that we can easily control them, and rework them to suit ourselves, triumphing over the weakness inherent in the flesh. The Borg give us a false vision of a triumph over nature, but it comes at a cost, with the loss of aesthetics as well as the incursion of a potentially uncontrollable force within us. Functionality has run rampant in the Borg, taking over not just their bodies and minds, but, it would seem, their soul(s) as well. These are some of the ways that the Borg reflect on or comment on the human experience, especially as it is practiced in America in the late 20th century. If the Borg as a species continue to appear and adapt in *Star Trek*, it will be interesting to track their changes, to see how they continue to confront and challenge us with their mode of being.

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    "I, Borg"
    "Family"
    "Descent, Part I"

"Descent, Part II"

Voyager (1994-1998)
"Unity"
"Scorpion, Part I"
"Scorpion, Part II"
"The Gift"
"The Raven"

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Inverted Pyramids Versus Hypertexts:

A Qualitative Study of Readers' Responses to Competing Narrative Forms

by

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Inverted Pyramids Versus Hypertexts:

A Qualitative Study of Readers' Responses to Competing Narrative Forms

The advent of new communication technologies has brought forth a set of opportunities and challenges for traditional media professions, such as journalism. This challenging new context is evident from the plethora of books and articles that explore the future of traditional media professions in the digital environment. The purpose of this paper is to enter into this large discussion--what is the future of journalism in the digital environment?--by focusing on the particular challenges to narrative form posed by hypertext. Specifically, it will report the findings of a qualitative study of online news users who read both an original news story that appeared on the Los Angeles Times website and a redesigned, hypertext version of the same material. By asking readers to think about and explain the differences between these competing forms of news, we hope to begin documenting the viability of hypertext and exploring its implications for journalism practice. The remainder of this paper will explain the theoretical framework guiding this study, methodology and method used, findings generated, and conclusions and implications for future research and professional practice.

New Technology and the Challenge of Hypertext

Within the scholarly literature examining the social and professional impacts of new communication technologies, researchers have drawn contrasting conclusions regarding the implications of electronic media on theory and practice. On the one hand, scholarship centered largely in the arts and humanities suggests sea changes in narrative form and in the relationship between authors, texts, and audiences. While this body of work taken as a whole is stimulating, challenging, and evocative, it is guided by highly abstract, theoretical propositions and lacks a solid grounding in empirical evidence. On the other hand, scholarship centered in preprofessional fields, such as journalism education, tends to examine how new technologies are adopted by media producers and adapted to existing industrial routines, needs, and practices. While this research typically is grounded in some sort of empirical evidence, it tends to lack the experimentation and imagination so vividly suggested by more abstract scholarship. This section will briefly outline the contributions of these contrasting literatures and situate the present study as an attempt to address the legitimate concerns brought forth in both of them.

Within the arts and humanities, numerous scholars have suggested that contemporary society is in a period of fundamental transformation in regard to what is considered "good writing" and accepted, narrative practices (Birkerts, 1994; Bolter, 1991; Bolter & Grusin, 1999; Landow, 1997; Murray, 1997). Characterized as "the late age of print" (Bolter, 1991), this period can be thought of as analogous to the 50 years following the introduction of the Gutenberg press and the invention of typographical and organizational conventions such as typefaces, page numbers, paragraphs, and chapters (Murray, 1997). Such "incunabular" periods are characterized by experimentation, invention, and struggle to develop new media conventions. This period of sweeping change has been recognized by a relatively small number of journalism educators who have identified the need to adapt journalistic practices to the challenges posed by new communication technologies (Fredin, 1997; Friedland & Webb, 1996; Lule, 1998; Newhagen & Levy, 1998; Pavlik, 1998). But most of the conceptual leadership in the area of invention has been taken by scholars in art and literature, where vigorous projects are underway to develop a new rhetoric, stylistics, and poetics (Bolter, 1991; Condon & Butler, 1997; Joyce, 1995; Landow, 1997; Murray, 1997; Vitanza, 1998). Much of this invention has centered on developing an understanding of the nature and function of "hypertext."

Hypertext is a structure that is assumed to be more compatible with the inherent characteristics of digital media than traditional narrative forms, such as journalism's inverted pyramid (Bolter, 1991; Fredin, 1997; Joyce, 1995; Murray, 1997; Nielsen, 1995). When it was introduced by computer visionary Ted Nelson in the 1960s, the concept, "hypertext," was defined simply as non-sequential writing with reader controlled links. Since then, scholars have refined this general definition beyond a simple visual form to a more abstract notion of "structures for what does not yet exist" (Joyce, 1995, p. 179). That is, hypertext is defined as a narrative form that does not exist until readers produce it through a series of choices made according to their desires and interests.[1] By refining this definition from a simple textual format to a more abstract notion of structures for making meaning, scholars have opened up a broad area of inquiry with implications for information gathering, processing, design, and delivery.

Despite the breadth of the literature examining the qualities of hypertext, certain central characteristics have emerged repeatedly, and they stand in stark contrast to the standard journalistic form. Modern narrative structures, including journalism, are characterized by a "canon of unity"--a singular author exerting an authoritative voice, a fixed order of events, and a developed story line (Bolter, 1991; Joyce, 1995; Landow, 1997; Murray, 1997). Hypertexts, by contrast, are in flux, impermanent, and designed to change. Rather than prescribing a fixed, linear reading order, hypertexts exist as networks or metatemplates of potential texts (Fredin, 1997; Landow, 1997; Murray, 1997). Furthermore, they do not communicate through a singular voice of authority, but incorporate multiple perspectives and expressions to tell the same story. Murray (1997) provides an example typical of what could be found in a newspaper: an account of a suicide told through the form of a "violence hub." Rather than representing the who's, what's, and why's of the suicide through the account of a single author, Murray suggests that hypertext reporters gather complementary and competing accounts. She envisions these accounts as occupying different locations peering in on the same event, much as the outer spokes of a wheel ultimately connect to a central hub. Such reporting results in neither a solution of the incident nor a refusal of resolution but a "continual deepening in the reader's understanding of what happened" (p. 136). Finally, hypertexts embrace notions of contradiction, fragmentation, juxtaposition, and pluralism, rather than pursuing "truth" that is at the heart of the traditional journalistic enterprise (Bolter, 1991; Murray, 1997). This approach is described not only as more responsive to the qualities of new, digital media, but as more compatible with challenges from postmodern perspectives that "no longer believe[s] in a single reality, a single integrating view of the world, or even the reliability of a single angle of perception" (Murray, 1997, p. 161). This sort of interruption in the unified view of reality creates the context for the inviting potentials of hypertext.

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[1] The literatures we review rest, for the most part, on a set of related polarities--between order and chaos, truth and ignorance, facts and opinion, the coherent and the incoherent, the real and the interpretive--related to the portrayal of narrative forms (e.g. the encoder controlled versus decoder controlled). It is beyond the purpose of this paper to critique and interrupt this set of polarities, though they bear mention as limitations to the advance of theories of new, narrative practices. See Dervin (in press) for a fuller explanation.

Aside from the structural and visual properties that suggest radical changes in narrative form, hypertext theory also posits transformations in the way authors and readers are conceptualized. New communication technologies are considered inherently participatory, which casts readers as active producers of stories. Hypertext readers take on the role of authors, which alters the traditional tasks of reporting and writing. Fredin (1997) argues that readers always have been active and self-reflective, and that hypertext journalists must provide them with choices that appeal to their interests. This requires not only a specific sense of reader interests, but a more general, theoretical understanding of user expectations and information seeking strategies. When readers are viewed more as collaborators than as consumers, the tasks of reporting and writing shift from content delivery to information development and design. News reporting and editing undertaken from this perspective must be focused on creating narrative structures that facilitate user navigation through a variety of information resources. Such resources might include a host of "raw data" such as reporter's notes, interview transcripts, government documents, and other materials that would allow readers to construct their own versions of reality, rather than simply reading a reporter's representation of reality. The resulting hypertexts call attention to the process of narrative construction, and enhance the involvement of readers by actually placing them in the role of the creator (Murray, 1997).

The preceding, abbreviated review of contemporary theories of hypertext contain enormous implications for journalism education and practice. At the macro end of the spectrum, this literature suggests changes in widely accepted tenets of journalism: the abandonment of truth and accuracy and the embrace of the polyvocal, fragmented universe. Such grandiose implications are important to contemplate but fall outside of the immediate interests of this paper. At the micro end of the spectrum, this literature argues that reporters and writers in the online environment must be more intimately concerned with the design of their work. Furthermore, they must be concerned with designs that respond to the reconceptualization of the relationship between authors and readers. In short, this literature implies that journalism students, educators, and practitioners should begin exploring alternatives to the traditional journalistic narrative in order to develop news story prototypes. A review of the recent scholarship and textbooks in journalism, however, indicates that most scholars and practitioners are working to adapt new technologies in ways that conform to existing norms and practices.

New Technology and Contemporary Journalism

Within the realm of journalism studies of new media, what seems to be emerging is, at best, an ambivalent sense of the impact of new technologies on traditional practices. While scholarly articles and textbooks generally recognize the significant shift and challenge to traditional norms represented by new communication technologies, most of this literature tends to project images of new media practices that are consistent with the professional status quo. The new frontiers implicit in the hypertext theories reviewed above are, for the most part, absent from the research and textbooks that explore online journalism.

Within the academic research, for example, scholars have begun to explore the attitudes of media practitioners toward new technologies and to document how online news is being practiced. The attitudes of reporters and editors tend to mix excitement over the new potentials afforded by new media with fear of and resistance to the challenges to journalistic traditions (Singer, 1997; Williams, 1998). Typical responses to new media include uneasiness and lamentation that traditional demarcations, such as "the firewall between advertising and news," the distinction between news and entertainment, and the separation of objectivity and opinion, are in danger of disappearing (Williams, 1998, p. 31). These attitudes are reified in the actual transition from print to online formats. Studies of online newspaper content, for example, have found no difference, other than minor formatting changes, between print and electronic products (Harper, 1996; Martin, 1998). Finally, studies of how new technologies are used in reporting and editing indicate that computers and the Internet are used exclusively to extend existing journalistic practices--e.g. fact checking, generating story ideas, gathering background material, and monitoring the competition (Garrison, 1995, 1997; Ross, 1998). The overwhelming trend portrayed in the scholarly research is that reporters and editors interpret and use new media in ways that conform to traditional tenets of journalism and established, news industry practices.

This tendency in the scholarly literature is reinforced by (and, perhaps, a byproduct of) the guidance offered by the online news and computer-assisted reporting textbooks. For the most part, textbooks aimed at news workers and journalism students are atheoretical, "how-to" manuals for incorporating new technologies into professional practices. At the most introductory level, textbooks envision the Internet and other electronic resources as faster and bigger tools that primarily expand the range of existing news sources (McGuire, Stilborne, McAdams & Hyatt, 1997; Reddick & King, 1997; Rich, 1999; Wendland, 1996). When placed in the service of talented journalists, this expanded range of sources is considered beneficial to the traditional role of the press. "The more access to information reporters have, the better reporters will be able to fulfill their mission to inform the public about key issues and interests of the day" (Reddick &

King, 1997, p. 4). Indeed, the use of new technologies advocated in these texts does not question the status quo of journalism, but reinforces it with renewed urgency. "The job we have as journalists, or gatekeepers, is to present the news as completely and accurately as possible, using our expertise to provide proper emphasis on what is significant and reliable" (Wendland, 1996, p. 17).

Aside from these introductory texts, more advanced books and articles have begun to explore more specific journalistic applications using new technologies. For example, a number of texts provide instruction in "computer-assisted reporting," which aim to harness the power of computers to enhance traditional, investigative journalism (DeFleur, 1997; Garrison, 1996; Houston, 1999). These texts provide training on how to use computers to make spreadsheets, manage databases, and access online resources so that reporters can continue to fulfill their watchdog role in society. Bolstering this advanced use of computers in reporting is scholarship aimed at developing professional skills to evaluate online sources (Ketterer, 1998). Using criteria from Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., Ketterer described a college news project to develop "accurate and credible" online resources to be used by student reporters and editors. The results from the project served to reinforce existing journalistic norms and established power relationships in society, as a majority of the online resources were tied to government sources or other online newspapers. In fact, the project explicitly eschewed much of the expanded information universe--those online sites tied to nonprofit organizations--because they were presumed to "by their nature promote a point of view" (p. 12). This and the other texts noted above have had the ironic effect of shrinking the range of voices and perspectives in the new electronic environment by forcing digital media to conform to existing journalistic norms and practices.

For the most part, studies of new electronic media conducted within the framework of journalism education lack the sense of fundamental change suggested in the hypertext literature. Likewise, these texts convey very little sense that journalism stands at the crossroads of invention and departure from the past in one direction, and the continuation of the status quo in the other direction. Nevertheless, the journalism studies literature is grounded in the empirical reality of day-to-day news production, a dimension that is missing from the research on hypertext that advocates sweeping changes in narrative form and function. Instead, the hypertext literature advocates radical invention and change, but neglects to bring such changes into contact with either working professionals or with actual readers. This paper aims to explore the challenges of hypertext to journalism in a way that is inventive and creative, yet grounded in an empirical dimension.

Methodology and Method

The completion of this study involved three basic phases: the selection and design of hypertext news stories; the performance of a reading exercise using volunteers; and the completion of qualitative, Sense-Making, interviews with these volunteers regarding the thoughts and experiences of readers. Each of these phases will be explained briefly below.

Since hypertext narratives as described above simply do not exist on traditional news sites, we selected existing news stories and redesigned them ourselves using basic principles of hypertext.[2] Because of the multiperspectival, fragmented, polyvocal nature of hypertext, we sought out complex news stories on the web. Since the Los Angeles Times is known for its lengthy treatments of a variety of topics in its "Column One" section, we monitored its content during a one-month period. In that time we selected three different stories to serve as articles in this study. The articles were selected for diverse content, as we wanted readers to have a choice of what to read in this study. The articles included a news feature on a trend among immigrants to transfer the remains of their ancestors from their home country to U.S. soil; a news story on the difficulties faced by people living in post-Soviet Siberia; and a recreation story on an adventure sport called "slack-lining," which is similar to walking a tight-rope across a mountain gorge. These stories, as well as redesigned, hypertext versions of them, were copied onto a local web server.[3] The original articles were essentially electronic copies of the printed versions, which, when accessed by computer, had to be read by scrolling down the screen from beginning to end. The redesigned versions contained no new material; rather, they were simply broken into thematic parts that had to be activated by clicking on links running along the left side of the computer screen (see Appendix A for the opening screens of each news story). Aside from slight changes in transitional phrases, the hypertext content was identical to the original article; only the form was altered--from a unified, linear story versus a non-sequential narrative with reader controlled links.

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[2] Lieb's (1999) online supplement, Editing for the web, for example, found only one example of a hypertext story (http://cgi.chicago.tribune.com/tech/frobel/frobsum.htm) on a traditional news site. Likewise, Fredin (1997) noted that virtually all online news provides links external to stories themselves to other, related stories, not hypertext links that form part of the internal structure of the narrative.

Once the news stories were installed on a local server, 20 volunteers drawn from a liberal arts university setting participated in a reading exercise. Volunteers were recruited from publicity posted around campus calling for people who "enjoyed reading online news" to participate in study of new forms of online journalism. The participants were scheduled for reading and interview sessions where they were placed in a quiet office with a computer that was connected to the Internet. After brief instructions, an explation of the purpose of the study, and a review of the basic operations of the Netscape browser, participants were left alone to select one article and to read and compare the original and hypertext versions (see Appendix B for opening computer screen). Our purpose in having participants read both versions of the article was to enlist them as new technology theorists in the research act. Each participant was provided a one-page sheet that contained the various dimensions of our questionnaire, with blank space to be used for taking notes during reading (see Appendix C). Participants were encouraged to jot down their thoughts as they related to the various dimensions while reading, and to use the sheet as a memory aid during the interview. Participants were interrupted after 15 minutes and asked if they had finished reading the articles. In some cases, readers asked for additional time, which never exceeded another 10 minutes.

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[3] Simple usability principles guided the redesign of the articles (see Nielsen, 1995, ch. 10).

Following the reading exercise, participants were guided through Sense-Making interviews, which were tape recorded and transcribed word-for-word. Sense-Making is a methodology and method that is founded on particular communication principles and assumptions of how people actively negotiate and construct meanings from their material and symbolic experiences. Interview protocols developed out of the principles and assumptions of Sense-Making, in effect, situate participants at the center of determining substantive content, while providing a structure that allows for cross-comparison of data (Dervin, 1983, 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1992). Participants in this study, for example, discussed how their selected article compared--original version versus hypertext--in terms of their overall interest, confusions, difficulties, usefulness, confidence, emotions, satisfaction, and enjoyment. They also were asked how their experiences with the texts might inform contemporary journalism in the online environment. Interview transcripts were analyzed using inductive, qualitative research techniques where concepts, categories, themes, and relationships emerged from the data set (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Each transcript was read by at least 4 different persons, at least 3 times before final categories and patterns were identified. What emerged from the 20 interviews was a rich set of transcripts in which the participants, in essence, theorized the relationships between texts, readers, reporting, and writing. These subject-generated theories of hypertext are presented below.

Inductively Derived Themes

During data analysis, the research team worked inductively to identify all concepts and then to organize them into more abstract categories and themes. The themes that will be reported here were constructed for their heuristic value, rather than for other purposes, such as the creation of a complete, user typology or a range of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories. Because we sought to identify patterns in the data, we required that at least one-third of our participants cluster under a thematic category in order for it to be included below.

The most common characteristic of this data set is the presence of multiple contradictions that run through it. On the most general level, the 20 participants in this study were evenly split in their general reactions to the narrative forms: 5 preferred the hypertext, 5 preferred the original, and the remaining 10 had mixed responses. Looking closer at the 20 transcripts, we identified a variety of themes that emerged in the form of paired contradictions. The various themes can be subsumed into three general categories: conceptualizations of the user/reader, characteristics of the narrative form, and self-reflexive hypotheses regarding intentionality and context. The remainder of this section will discuss each of these categories in turn.

Reader Agency

The most robust thematic category that emerged from the data concerned conceptualizations of the reader/user. Specifically, participants talked about the issues of choice, control, work, and labor in terms of their personal satisfaction and edification as readers. While many readers found the ability to choose a narrative path in a hypertext to be a positive and enjoyable experience, a large number of participants identified this as a violation of the author's integrity and an onerous burden placed on the reader. These personal accounts are summarized below.

Choice/control versus author intention. The most frequent theme that readers in this study discussed concerned the ability of choice that the hypertext form provided. Participants made explicit distinctions between the hypertext's open narrative paths and the original article's prescribed reading order as being at the heart of the provision of choice:

> In the first one [original article], I skipped ahead because I was kinda bored. And in the second one, there was this tiny little snippet at the beginning. So you're kinda forced to skip around. You go to a link, and you skip ahead, and you go

> back and forth. You play around with the links. but I skipped ahead on the first one, too. The thing about the hypertext one is that I could skip to where I wanted to skip. As opposed to the other one, where you had to read it like a book and kinda skip like you'd be flipping pages or something. (Luke F.)

> On the original article, I had to read though a lot of extraneous information that I did not feel was personally important. I had to read it begrudgingly. I wanted to cut to the chase. I wanted to know what the meat of the story was. The hypertext article allowed me to do that. The original article did not. (David D.)

Users of traditional texts had to follow a prescribed order of reading, while users of hypertext had to make choices. The need to make choices seemed to be facilitated by the topical links on the computer screen that were intended to function as metacommunicative "maps" of the stories' contents:

> With the original, you have to read the whole story to get it. You piece it together as you read it. And with the hypertext, you can look to the left on the menu and you see all the parts in the story. And you don't have to read it in the order that they wrote it in the original version. (Kelly S.)

Several participants described this aspect of the hypertext as opening up cognitive potential--new modes for thinking and making meaning-- for them as readers. Seeing all the parts of the narrative on one screen led them to ask more questions and to notice more facets of the story:

> It piqued my interest a little more. It wasn't just "why do it?", it was like "why do they do it? How do they do it? why is this interesting?" With the different choices on the hypertext article, it spurred more questions in my mind. (David D.)

> I saw a lot more in the hypertext than the original, just because it was broken up. I felt that I had an outline to go by. (Sandra M.)

What seemed to be most important to participants discussing positive aspects of choice, however, was that the hypertext form responded to their needs and interests by providing a variety of content paths to follow:

> The Los Angeles Times, or the original article just seemed to go on and on, and I found myself just skimming the story as a whole. With the hypertext I was able to divide my interests into subcategories and I was able to pick and choose what I was interested in, and eventually I ended up reading the whole article.
>
> I wasn't that interested in the human interest aspect of the story, I was more interested in the politics and decisions that led to the crisis in Siberia. So that's why I went to the economics portion of the hypertext article. I started with

> economics and then went to psychology. I went to my interests first, which I enjoyed, and then I went through the whole article. The original article starts off with "this is this person, la, la, la," and I just got confused and bored.
>
> The hypertext, I was able to choose what I wanted to read about. It's kind of empowering because it's what I want to read. I'm choosing. I'm not being told. (Melvin C.)

In contrast to the 10 participants who found choice to be a beneficial, empowering, and positive aspect of the stories, about one-third of the readers described choice as detrimental, difficult, and objectionable. Several participants, for example, explicitly talked about the hypertext form violating the efforts and intentions of the author:

> I kinda like news articles in the way the journalist wrote them. I figure they're trying to do that, and most of them have been doing that a while, and they know what they're doing. They know how to write a good article for the most part, and it seems like the article should be read as the journalist intended and not as kind of just, you know, the browser skimming little parts here and there, skipping along in the article, unorganized and fragmented. (Jeff T.)

Providing readers with choices, at least for some in this study, violated the traditional authority of the author. Moreover, it truncated the ability to comprehend the material for a several reasons. On the one hand, providing readers with choices placed issues of design into relief, which distracted some readers:

> It was simpler to read the original text than to have to think about where would they put it. Where is it in all these links? Why would they put it there? You kind of have to like hop into the designer's mind and figure out where, under which title it would be most appropriate. And with the original text it was all there. You didn't have to worry about anything like that. Just scroll down, scroll down. And enjoy the reading, understand the reading. There wasn't as much thinking involved. (Carrie C.)

In addition to calling attention to the story as a designed object, the hypertext's open order was described as somewhat overwhelming and hard to keep track of:

> You had to click on, and you didn't go in, I mean, you're not made to go in any certain order. So you have all these pieces of the story that you, I mean, people aren't really going to fit that into their own heads. They're just going to take it, and it's just going to stick in their heads as different parts of the story, and it's not going to stay up there as well. (Patricia C.)

For several participants, the open order of the hypertext was interpreted as enjoyable and responsive to their interests, while its discontinuity was confusing and distracting:

> It was just the distraction of seeing what was coming in the article and choosing what order I wanted to read it in the hypertext article; the article lost continuity that way. It was more fun to choose, but like I said, it lost continuity, and it was a little harder to follow. But the original, at the same time, didn't have that fun aspect. I got to look at what I wanted to look at, like I didn't read the personal stories on the hypertext version because I didn't want to. But then, when I went back and read them in the original article, and was almost forced to read them because it fit in the flow, I enjoyed those. But it wasn't something that I necessarily wanted to do. That's just the way I've learned how to read. It just makes it easier to process it, rather than having to put it together in my mind. (Ellen S.)

Related to this notion of additional burden represented by choice is the theme of general effort, work, and labor required of readers in the hypertext versus original versions.

The joy/drudgery of work. About two-thirds of our participants commented that one or the other narrative version required more effort on the part of the reader in general. But these participants were divided in a variety of ways on the significance of the labor required to move through the stories. Many of the readers complained that with the original article, they were forced to read the entire story in order to gain a complete understanding of the topic. A larger group of participants identified the hypertext as a form that required more effort, but these readers were divided in terms of whether that additional effort was a positive or negative aspect of their experience.

The original narrative required readers to follow a particular order and gave no hints regarding the story's overall content. A number of readers complained that this led them to become bored and/or lost while moving through the story. The most common response among readers was to skim through the original, rather than reading it word-for-word. One reader, however, eventually abandoned the story altogether:

> It [the original] just seemed to drag on an on, and I think that maybe I have a short attention span, so I like things to be concise. So I just kept skimming, and going back and forth. I didn't get a lot of the information that I wanted. I didn't understand why the town was being abandoned until I read the hypertext. There was a disagreement between the Russian government and the regional government. That's the information I was not able to get. I was interested in it. I just got tired of looking for it in the original, and I just gave up. (Melvin C.)

Many participants identified the hypertext as a generally more laborious form, but some of the readers interpreted that as a positive quality. Forcing the reader to dig for further information provided fulfillment to certain participants:

> I loved the source listing. I'd love to get more information. In a way, it kind of weeds out people who want to read more and separates them from people who want to just read the first few paragraphs. It weeds out the people who just want to read the story and just forget about it from there. I was certainly more satisfied with the hypertext article. (Bill T.)

Furthermore, a number of participants talked about the hypertext form as something that allowed them to "play around" while looking for information:

> On the hypertext, even though I was slightly bored by the content, at least I could play around with the links and jump around, which is always more entertaining. (Luke F.)

> I spent more time in the hypertext than I did on the original, because I was doing more playing around over here in the hypertext by going to the different links and then getting caught up in one of them. (Maggie S.)

While some participants found the labor of the hypertext satisfying and enjoyable, an equal number identified it as frustrating and bothersome. Because the hypertext links only contained a few words, some participants felt that they had to guess at the contents associated with them, which they found frustrating:

> I was definitely more satisfied with the original text. It was more pleasing for me to read, and I understood it better. Less stress involved with it in a way. I guess that sounds lazy, but I didn't have to worry about finding where else to go get it or would they hide it under this topic or under that topic. Once you got to the main page then went to a link and there were a couple more links on that page so you had to keep searching, like an endless game of hide and seek. Sometimes you got it right, and sometimes you had to keep looking. (Carrie C.)

Aside from the frustration that accompanied the search for information, several participants commented that the cognitive effort of putting a story together was a difficulty for them:

> I think in the original article, I was able to get a better picture of the whole scene and situation and all the background I needed to understand it. And in the second one, I had to move around. It's harder to bring all that information together than it is when it is presented as a whole. The second one required more effort--I sound so lazy--but the effort it took to find the story was frustrating. (Christy S.)

Finally, one participant expressed resentment at what he considered a violation of the author's responsibility to the reader:

> Reading in and of itself is not really that much of a mental strain, but if you have to go hunting for information. It started to feel more like you were trying to research the story than reading about it. I guess I see it as the journalist's job. They're getting paid for that and that's what they do. And for the purpose of reading the news, it's to get all the relevant information and it kinda riled me that it was presented to me as if it was my job to click the links and follow up on the story and look at the list of sources. It seemed like I would be paying for basically doing more work than I would have to do. People don't look at the news where they have to work at it. They just want the story. (Jeff T.)

The sentiments expressed above that are critical of what might be called "active reading" were reinforced and clarified by many of the commentaries that focused on the competing characteristics of the two textual formats.

Textual Qualities

Comments concerning conceptualizations of the reader/user constituted the most robust theme in this study. The next major theme emerging from the data regarded comments related to characteristics of the narrative formats. Specifically, participants identified the texts as either fragmented or linear, novel or conventional. As with previous themes, participants were divided on the benefits and drawbacks of these contrasting forms.

Wholeness versus fragmentation. Almost half of the participants in the study criticized the hypertext form as being disorganized and difficult to follow. Terms used to describe the hypertext included "fragmented," "choppy," "jumbly," "not cohesive," "butchered," "mutilated," "haphazard," "disjointed," "less complete," "sectioned," "disconnected," and "cut and pasted." For these participants, this format made the hypertext harder to process, understand, and remember:

> I really hated the hypertext. To me it seemed like reading a very detailed outline. It's very choppy, and it's disorganized when it's like that because it doesn't flow logically. (Carol L.)

> I found that the original article in the traditional text form kept my attention and my interest more than the hypertext because the hypertext, you have a piece here,

> but you have to go to another button to find more information. And just having the process of clicking the button and getting where you need to go broke the continuity of the story. You couldn't think linearly, and the original article just had it all logically proceeding. The hypertext was a lot harder to get. (Carrie C.)

In contrast to the fragmented nature of the hypertext, the original story was praised for the narrative "flow" that it achieved. Participants suggested that the original article "felt more organized," presented the "whole story," and "had it all [the details] right there." The original form was easier to comprehend for these participants, who described the text as having "continuity," "completeness," and "sequence":

> I think because I do some writing and I like to see things that flow in a good way and aren't disjointed. Something that's easy for the reader to get into. (Christy S.)

> I guess I felt more satisfied as a reader when I finished the original article because I looked at that one as a whole, compared to the hypertext article, which seemed like pieces. (Thomas J.)

> I read all the time, and I like doing it. And I think there's a pleasure in just reading and just kind of keeping going. Because if I were just reading the hypertext, I wouldn't remember who was who, or who was from where and which families we're talking about. So there is kind of a continuity that helps when reading the whole article. (Heather S.)

Finally, participants who preferred the original text said that it gave them a satisfying sense of closure that seemed to be missing in the hypertext:

> For me, having the whole entire article as one thing that gave me a sense of closure when I got to the end of it. Whereas when I first read the hypertext, I kept wondering, "Well, gosh, did I really finish? How do I piece it all together?" I just never felt like I exactly mastered the whole thing because I haven't really, I mean, there's no end. But then, when I went back and read the original, I got a sense of completion when I got to the end. So, because there is no closure in the hypertext, I don't feel as content or satisfied. (Sandra M.)

In contrast to the participants who preferred the original article, a small number of readers preferred the fragmented design of the hypertext. In addition, about one-third of the participants spoke both of the benefits and detriments of the hypertext, sometimes in the same sentence. Taken together, these two groups of readers were equivalent in number to the group of participants preferring the original article.

Among those who commented positively on the qualities of the hypertext form, participants explained that it was more organized, focused, and reflective of a greater range of information:

> I guess that it makes you more focused on certain things and you know you can always go for more information from there. And it's easier to focus on specifically what it is. You can jump to what you are interested in and in the newspaper article you have to read all of it to find specific things. I think it's more information quicker. The hypertext seemed more organized. I guess, back to the fact that it had specific headings and it was split into different categories, like it would have the information on how it started, whereas the original article just kind of had it all thrown together and it was more of a narrative type that you had to read all the way through. (Helen M.)

The organization of information into categories was valued for its ability to metacommunicate the entire contents of the story:

> The opening segment--it gave a great synopsis to the whole article. It was just right there, and I had it. When I'm reading the news, I want it to be boom boom, right there for me to understand and adjust, and in the hypertext, it gave me the whole story in about two paragraphs, and that's all I needed. It was there for me, and if I was interested, I would read more. But just in case I wasn't interested, that was just enough information for me. (Melvin C.)

For this reader, the combination of the synopsis and the links led to the creation of what he termed a textual "flow," but one that was crafted by the reader:

> I was reading the hypertext, and I had a couple of questions because I always question when I read. It's kind of annoying, but I do. So I have questions when I read, and I could look to the left and look up and down and not all of my questions were answered, but some of them were, and I could just click on it and then go back to the main page. It wasn't a different flow from the author, it was the flow that I had chosen. I don't perceive it to be a disturbance to the flow of the news because it's going according to the flow that I am choosing. (Melvin C.)

Many readers who commented on textual qualities found the hypertext and original forms to offer competing advantages and disadvantages. While the hypertext presented the reader with choices that responded to specific needs and interests, those choices entailed additional labor:

> I liked the traditional one because it was just nice and all right there in one bulk form. I didn't have to go searching for bits and pieces. Of course, in the hypertext,

> I really enjoyed having the option of being able to find what I wanted. If I wanted to find something more in depth, those links were really nice for that. (Maggie S.)

Despite the added work involved in clicking through a hypertext, this narrative form was "more controllable," which appealed to some readers:

> I would say first off that the hypertext article grabbed my attention just a little more because of how it split the information into such short little groups. It seemed to be a little bit more controllable, doable, as far as reading was concerned, in a way because everything was several short little stories, which just appeals to me as a reader. The original article, I kind of liked it more because it had kind of an emotional content that wasn't in the hypertext that held my attention through the whole story. (Henry J.)

Finally, the hypertext, while providing more information through its topical links, constituted a less compelling narrative than the traditional news story and news feature:

> Well, in the original text, I was much more drawn into it, and then the hypertext just kind of lays it all out for you. I guess it depends on what you're looking for. If you are looking for a fun story, then first go to the original to hear that, and then the hypertext was more straight facts. It just laid it out for you really quickly. (Anne E.)

Curiosity and novelty versus convention. Another significant pattern regarding the competing textual forms focused on either the novel or conventional nature of the stories and how it related to reader curiosity. For some readers, the novelty and structure of hypertext made them more curious and interested in the story. For others, the novelty was confusing. Many of these readers found it comforting to read "something that I'm used to." Participants were evenly divided in their perspectives regarding these two textual forms, and many readers were internally divided.

For some readers, the mere novelty of the form piqued their interest and propelled them to read further:

> I guess I just saw it as something new that I had never really heard of and didn't know anything about. I just wanted to look a little deeper into and see what it was. (Helen M.)

Aside from the pure novelty, the hypertext seemed to open up cognitive potential that was not possible with the original article. It provided a structure for the "opportunity to be curious":

> On the hypertext, I was curious. The links made me curious to find out what it was. When you see the little... on any article, I jump to the links. Just because they're... you're tempted by them. It kinda puts you in a different frame of mind. And I read it in that frame of mind, so it was more interesting. (Luke F.)

When contrasted with the traditional, journalistic narrative, this structure for curiosity was what led participants to continue reading:

> If I was flipping through a newspaper and I found this article, I would probably read the first paragraph and skim through the rest of it, maybe even skip to the last two paragraphs. With the hypertext article, I didn't have that desire. I read the first section and decided, "Ooh, I want to know about this." I would go to the link, I would read it, and then I would say, "Oh, this is interesting. I want to go to the next section." (David D.)

About the same number of people who found this novel form beneficial to their curiosity, described it in mixed terms. Some readers, for example, found that the hypertext format grabbed their attention at the same time that it confused them:

> The hypertext article was kind of like a novelty, if you will. That caught my attention and that's why I bring that up. It's the first thing that struck me. That was the first time I saw it. This is just my personal opinion, but I'm used to reading news stories all on one page, and I assume that it is written in the order that it is supposed to be read. And because I'm used to that, I was confused as to why they would lay it out in the way that they did, like a table of contents. (Bill T.)

This tension between the comfort of conventional text and the novelty of the hypertext form accompanied the experiences of several participants:

> The original article, it was pretty straightforward and laid out for me, so it wasn't very adventurous, but it wasn't very tedious. For me, it was cohesive and nice and easy to read. But I spent more time in the hypertext page because there is more stuff to look for and places to go, and you get new ideas as you start reading through. They provoked me to think more about, not even so much the topic of immigrants and their ancestors, but more... broader implications of why they do this or who are these people, what kind of religion they practice. (Maggie S.)

Indeed, the most frequent reason participants gave for preferring the original form was related to the comfort they experienced with conventional writing:

> I was annoyed because it's new, and it's something I'm not used to, and I've got to figure it out, and then I have to decide if I like it. And I eventually decided I didn't like it. And I was relieved with the original because I thought, "phew, this is what I know. This is what I'm used to." (Carol L.)

Beyond the recognizable, narrative form, several participants expressed satisfaction with the original article because of the implicit presence of an author:

> The original was more like, I don't know, perhaps it's just a bias towards more traditional news articles, but it was something about it being presented as a reported story. You kind of got a feeling for the person who had written it and the people he was talking about. (Henry J.)

Another factor that seemed to relate to reader satisfaction and competing textual forms was the style of writing in these particular articles. Each of the three stories was written from a human interest, anecdotal angle, which participants found more engaging than the summary, synopsis style of the hypertext versions:

> Like I said, I was a lot more interested in the original article because it started off with something that was really interesting and kind of emotional because, you know, it... all the human element was pretty much at the beginning. In the other part it was kind of disjointed, there were... it didn't read like a story. It was just basic information. So, I thought my feelings were... I had more emotional reaction to the original. (Susan D.)

Overall, our participants were evenly divided regarding how the textual forms intersected with their curiosity and interest. These competing textual forms also intersected with readers' evaluations of the credibility of the articles.

High and low credibility. About one-third of all participants said that they felt the original article was more credible and trustworthy because of textual characteristics. That is, the original article was more what they expected from a journalist, and fulfilled their criteria of "good writing," which they then transferred to the quality of the information. Finally, several readers commented that the clear presence of an author in the original version had an impact on how they evaluated the quality of the information:

> I kind of trusted, well, trusted might not be the way to put it; I kind of felt like there was an actual writer behind the original article, and so I was inclined to maybe trust that perspective a little bit more than I would, say, the hypertext one. I felt like it could have been written by any group of people. You want to feel like

> there's somebody who's been out there, who's investigated this, who knows what's going on, and who's trying to convey a story to you. (Henry J.)

On the other hand, about one-third of the participants claimed that the hypertext seemed more credible and trustworthy, again, due to textual characteristics. For example, the hypertext listed the sources used in the story for each article. This was commented on repeatedly by participants as a form of accountability in the article that gave them confidence in the reporting. In addition, several readers said that the way the hypertext was divided into categories reflected that more care was taken in the construction of the material, and that it demonstrated a desire to communicate that to the reader:

> It made the reporter in the hypertext article more interested in conveying information to the audience. In other words, the hypertext format said to me the reporter wants to share more information about the story than what's printed in the paper. So the hypertext was better in the sense that it made the reporting seem more confident. Because it wanted to convey more information that we needed, and hopefully, future articles will, you know, use that idea. (Bill T.)

The multiple contradictions running through the themes of reader agency and characteristics of the texts effectively disappeared when participants abandoned the immediate reading experience and made theoretical statements of a hypothetical nature.

Self-Reflexive Theories

Sprinkled throughout the interview transcripts were commentaries that abandoned the participants' immediate experiences and speculated about the uses of these competing forms in different conditions. Rather than clustering into paired contradictions, however, these self-reflexive theories tended to converge around themes regarding reader intentionality and article context.

Regardless of whether the participant preferred the original or the hypertext article, more than half of the participants explained that their selection of one format over the other would depend on their intended use of the article. Repeatedly, participants said that the hypertext would be a preferred form for fact-finding or for conducting "research," where specific details were being sought. Conversely, the original text was preferred by participants who were reading for leisure or pleasure.

Aside from reader intentions, contextual factors--including time constraints and type of story--were identified as playing a role in the appropriateness of narrative format. With few exceptions, participants agreed that the hypertext would be a preferred format in cases where the reader had little time to read. The hypertext was valued for its speed and convenience by one third of the participants. A smaller number of participants explained that the narrative formats seemed to coincide with article types. For breaking and hard news stories, hypertext was identified as a better form, while human interest features was identified as more amenable to linear narratives. Repeatedly, participants claimed that the hypertext lacked the emotional, human dimension that came through in all of the original articles.

Conclusions, Discussion, Implications

The competing patterns that emerged from the data regarding theories of the user, the text, and intention/context begin to fill out some of the theoretical issues raised in the first part of this paper. The overwhelming pattern that emerged from this data set was the consistent presence of multiple contradictions running throughout most of the major conceptual themes. What this implies for journalism educators, students, and practitioners is a mixed set of recommendations that both affirm and negate established values and practices, while commending the further exploration and invention of routines and conventions that respond to the challenges of digital media.

Ample evidence emerged from the interviews to suggest that journalism in the new electronic environment can occupy an enlarged space in terms of its role in society and its relationship to readers. The repeated comments regarding reader agency and qualities of hypertext as a guide or outline suggest that journalists will need to rethink and enlarge their role from arbiters of reality and truth to facilitators of social dialogue and cartographers of information and communication resources. Readers who commented positively on the work and play involved in constructing the news story were clearly less interested in receiving the true version of events than in being able to select narrative paths that most interested them. In the future, journalists will be better served by reporting skills that allow them to expand the range of information paths and by writing and design abilities that lead to narrative structures of navigation that respond to readers' expectations and desires.

This shift in the journalist's role and skills, however, does not spell the end of the author as suggested in the literature on hypertext. Nevertheless, it does appear to challenge the accepted conventions of "good writing." Indeed, many readers expressed comfort and pleasure in knowing that a living, breathing, thinking author stood behind the text on the screen. The positive response to the human dimension that was present in the original stories but absent from the more mechanical hypertexts suggests that professional writing will continue to be a valued skill in the creation of electronic texts. Furthermore, a number of readers conveyed a high regard and even an expectation for the author's guidance in moving through the stories. This reinforces the need for specialized encoding practices that are a part of contemporary journalism education and practice, but which depart from current conventions.

Obviously, this study has severe limitations due to its range of readers, artificial design, and limited number of stories. Our intention has not been to generate generalizable conclusions, however, but to explore theoretical challenges and premises through empirically derived, heuristic patterns. These patterns do provide tempered confirmation of assertions that hypertexts function very differently from linear narratives, and that such texts suggest a radically different relationship between authors and readers. In fact, given the novelty of hypertext, the literary bias of the participant pool, and the fact that the actual articles were reported, written, and designed using standard, journalistic conventions, these findings should be interpreted as erring on the conservative side--that is, the limitations of the study have a built-in bias favoring the original articles. Aside from the implications of this research that have been noted already, this study suggests that empirical research in journalism studies should move beyond collecting data and suggesting practices that merely squeeze established routines and values into the new spaces opened up by electronic media. This study points to a fertile range of research where scholars and practitioners can and should begin exploring and inventing journalism's future.

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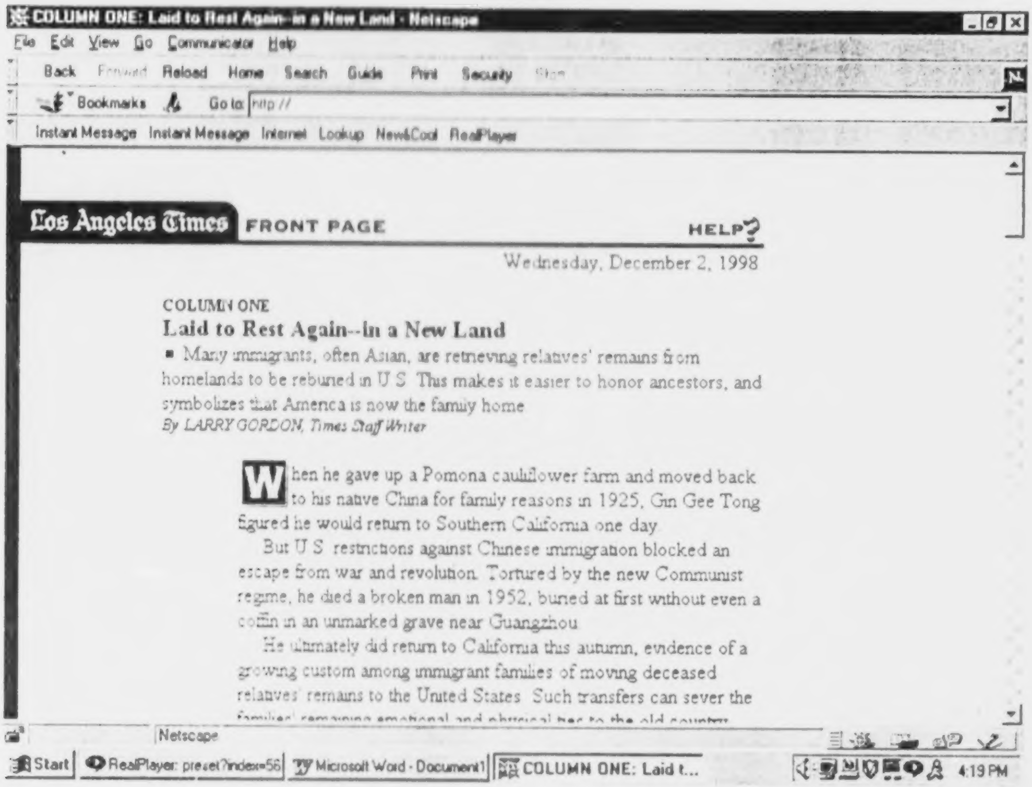
Appendix A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Wednesday, December 2, 1998

COLUMN ONE

Laid to Rest Again--in a New Land

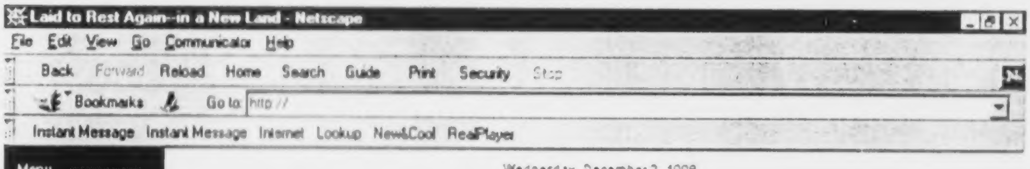
- Many immigrants, often Asian, are retrieving relatives' remains from homelands to be reburied in U.S. This makes it easier to honor ancestors, and symbolizes that America is now the family home

By LARRY GORDON, Times Staff Writer

When he gave up a Pomona cauliflower farm and moved back to his native China for family reasons in 1925, Gin Gee Tong figured he would return to Southern California one day.

But U.S. restrictions against Chinese immigration blocked an escape from war and revolution. Tortured by the new Communist regime, he died a broken man in 1952, buried at first without even a coffin in an unmarked grave near Guangzhou.

He ultimately did return to California this autumn, evidence of a growing custom among immigrant families of moving deceased relatives' remains to the United States. Such transfers can sever the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One man's story
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Wednesday, December 2, 1998

Laid to Rest Again--in a New Land

By LARRY GORDON, Times Staff Writer

- Many immigrants, often Asian, are retrieving relatives' remains from homelands to be reburied in U.S. This makes it easier to honor ancestors, and symbolizes that America is now the family home

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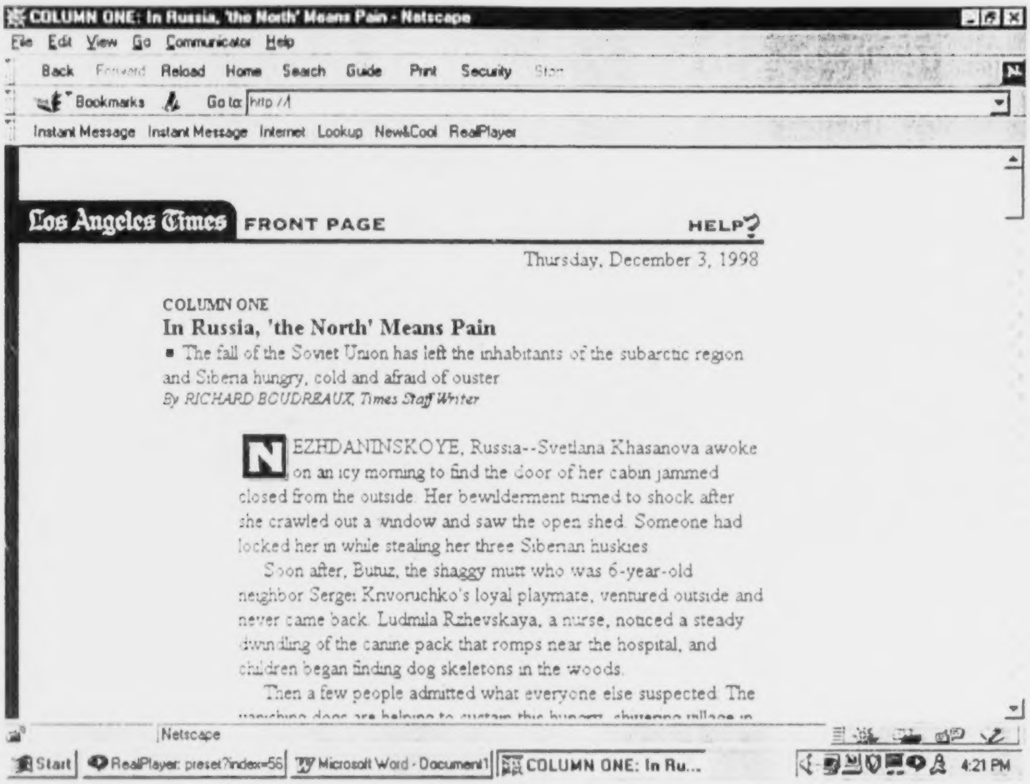
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Thursday, December 3, 1998

COLUMN ONE

In Russia, 'the North' Means Pain

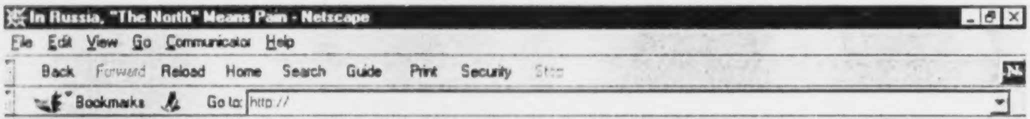
- The fall of the Soviet Union has left the inhabitants of the subarctic region and Siberia hungry, cold and afraid of ouster

By RICHARD BOUDREAUX, Times Staff Writer

NEZHDANINSKOYE, Russia--Svetlana Khasanova awoke on an icy morning to find the door of her cabin jammed closed from the outside. Her bewilderment turned to shock after she crawled out a window and saw the open shed. Someone had locked her in while stealing her three Siberian huskies.

Soon after, Butuz, the shaggy mutt who was 6-year-old neighbor Sergei Krivoruchko's loyal playmate, ventured outside and never came back. Ludmila Rzhevskaya, a nurse, noticed a steady dwindling of the canine pack that romps near the hospital, and children began finding dog skeletons in the woods.

Then a few people admitted what everyone else suspected. The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Siberia's history and background
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Psychological impact on people
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Thursday, December 3, 1998

In Russia, "The North" Means Pain

By RICHARD BOUDREAUX, Times Staff Writer

- The fall of the Soviet Union has left the inhabitants of the subarctic region and Siberia hungry, cold and afraid of ouster.

The story of a gold-mining settlement, from its pioneer origin 35 years ago to its near-certain demise, is a pitiful epitaph for Moscow's campaign to conquer the vast, hostile northern region. After more than a century of northward colonization, under czars and Central Committees, Russia is in painful, disorderly retreat.

Nearly 1 million settlers have migrated south since the Soviet Union's breakup shrank the subsidy that once guaranteed them high wages, abundant supplies and low prices in thousands of remote northern communities now too costly to maintain.

That leaves 11.9 million people in what Moscow loosely defines as "the North"--the Arctic regions of European Russia and everything east of the Ural Mountains. Many of these people barely work and rarely get paid, being too poor to leave or having nowhere to go, they have survived the past seven winters on Moscow's meager, erratic allotments of food and fuel.

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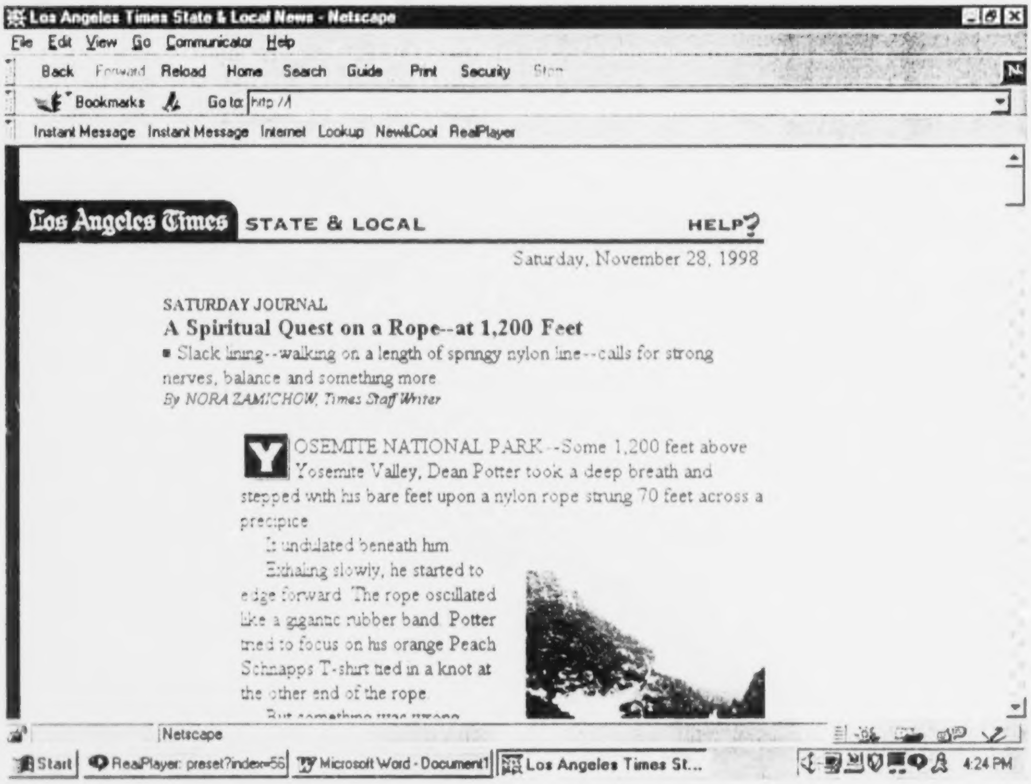
Appendix A (cont.)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Saturday, November 28, 1998

SATURDAY JOURNAL

A Spiritual Quest on a Rope--at 1,200 Feet

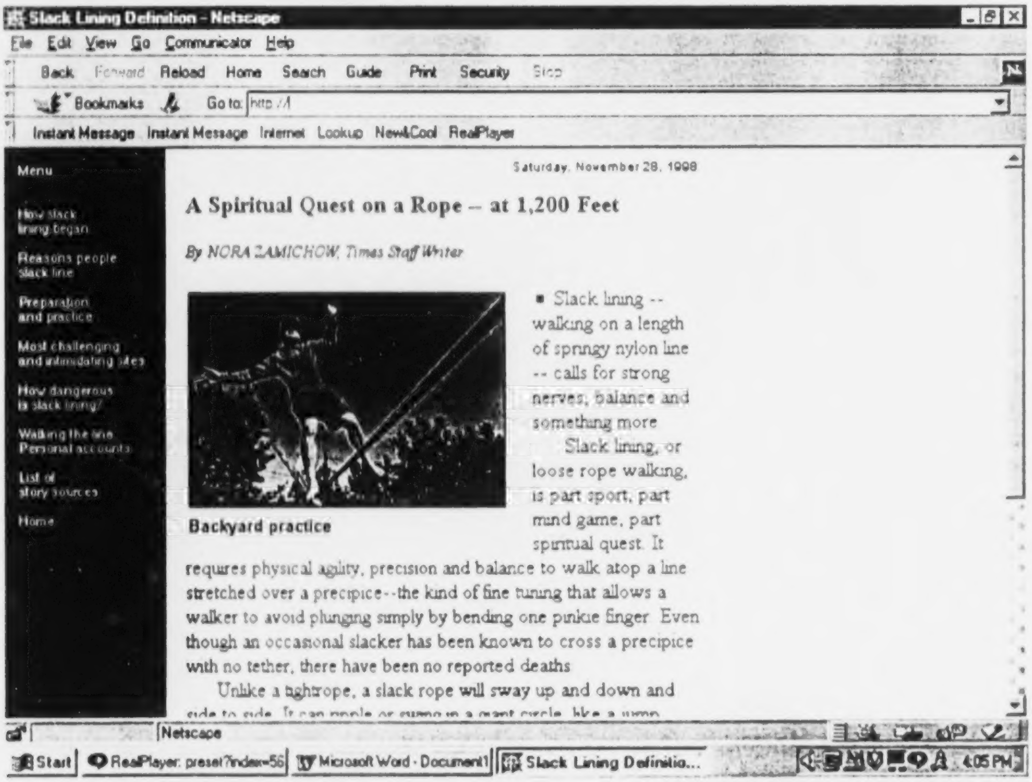
- Slack lining--walking on a length of springy nylon line--calls for strong nerves, balance and something more

By NORA ZAMICHOW, Times Staff Writer

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK--Some 1,200 feet above Yosemite Valley, Dean Potter took a deep breath and stepped with his bare feet upon a nylon rope strung 70 feet across a precipice

It undulated beneath him

Exhaling slowly, he started to edge forward The rope oscillated like a gigantic rubber band Potter tried to focus on his orange Peach Schnapps T-shirt tied in a knot at the other end of the rope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Saturday, November 28, 1998

A Spiritual Quest on a Rope -- at 1,200 Feet

By NORA ZAMICHOW, Times Staff Writer

Backyard practice

- Slack lining -- walking on a length of springy nylon line -- calls for strong nerves, balance and something more

Slack lining, or loose rope walking, is part sport, part mind game, part spiritual quest. It requires physical agility, precision and balance to walk atop a line stretched over a precipice--the kind of fine tuning that allows a walker to avoid plunging simply by bending one pinkie finger Even though an occasional slacker has been known to cross a precipice with no tether, there have been no reported deaths

Unlike a tightrope, a slack rope will sway up and down and

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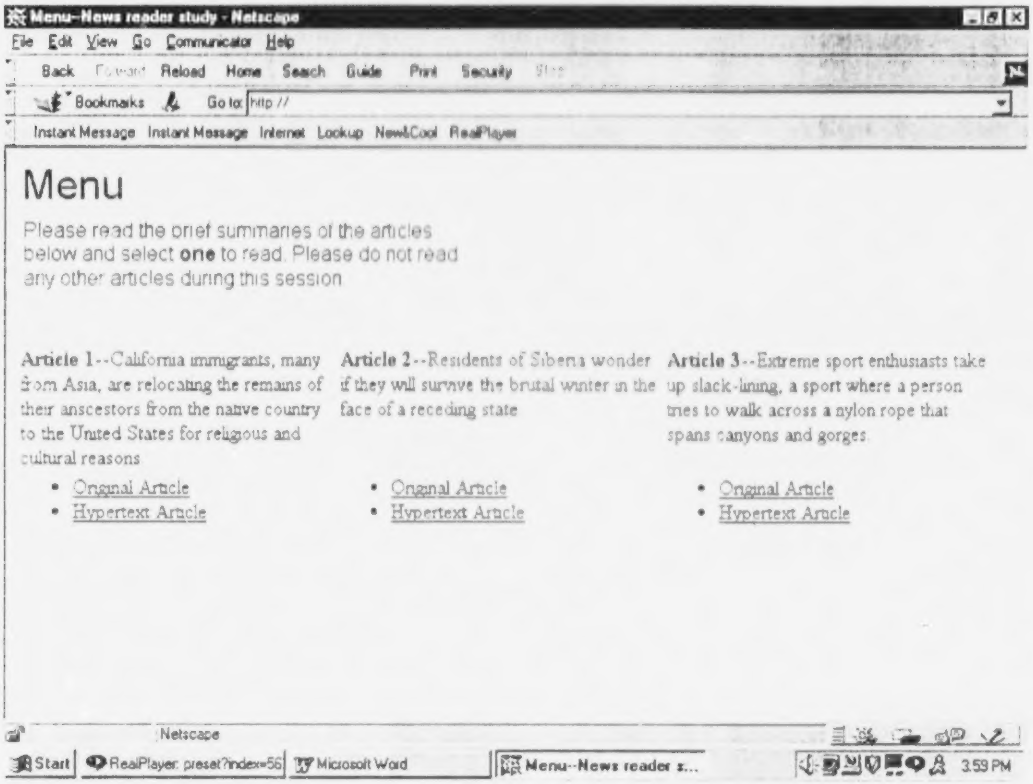
Appendix B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Article 1--California immigrants, many from Asia, are relocating the remains of their anscestors from the native country to the United States for religious and cultural reasons.

- Original Article
- Hypertext Article

Article 2--Residents of Siberia wonder if they will survive the brutal winter in the face of a receding state.

- Original Article
- Hypertext Article

Article 3--Extreme sport enthusiasts take up slack-lining, a sport where a person tries to walk across a nylon rope that spans canyons and gorges.

- Original Article
- Hypertext Article

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Qualitative Studies Division

Critical Theories and Cultural Studies in Mass Communication

By

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University of Houston
Houston, Texas 77022

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Paper presented to the Qualitation Studies Division,
Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
annual convention, New Orleans, LA, August 4-7, 1999

Qualitative StudiesDivision

Abstract of

Critical Theories and Cultural Studies in Mass Communication

By

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Michael Ryan
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University of Houston
Houston, TX 77024

This paper examines the role of critical theories and cultural studies in journalism and mass communication by (1) synthesizing two paradigms in contemporary cultural analysis that seek to explain the meaning of phenomena that make a culture, (2) explores some of the issues that are critical for teaching and research in mass communication, and (3) explores ways in which critical literature can be integrated into the teaching and research mission.

Switzer and Ryan are professors in the UH School of Communication and McNamara is a professor in the UH Department of English.

Critical Theories and Cultural Studies in Mass Communication

By Les Switzer, John McNamara, and Michael Ryan

Critical scholars in cultural studies raise serious questions about the assumptions, conditions, contexts, and texts of traditional academic disciplines such as journalism and mass communication, and they argue that many disciplines are in the midst of paradigmatic crises in their linguistic and analytical protocols, theories, methods, and parameters of study (e.g., Skinner, 1985).

Some mass communication scholars argue that journalism and mass communication research and teaching must be sufficiently broad to accommodate the critical literature (e.g., Carey, 1975; Winter, 1986; Dervin, Grossberg, O'Keefe, and Wartella, 1989; Goldman, 1990; Kellner, 1995; Parisi, 1992), but it is a literature to which many in mass communication are not exposed. Indeed, Goldman (1990) and Carey (1975) have argued that many mass communication scholars and students are antagonistic toward critical studies.

We hope this synthesis and accompanying suggestions will help students, researchers, and teachers approach this vast and frequently obsure literature in a way that will produce useful insights and increase understanding. First, we outline two paradigms in contemporary cultural analysis that seek to explain the meaning of phenomena that make a culture;[1] second, we explore some of the issues that are crucial for communication teaching and research; and third, we discuss ways in which critical literature can be integrated into the teaching and research mission.

Paradigm I: Culture as a material system

Paradigm I adherents assume (1) that a culture is primarily a material system that embraces economic, social, and political conditions that are expressed in a variety of cultural forms, and (2) that the system shapes the ways in which individuals experience these conditions and represent them to themselves and others. Material conditions have realities of their own, and communicative acts in some sense are conditioned by the material world. Since these relations usually involve unequal distributions of resources and power, analyses of material conditions tend to focus on the ways in which a dominant culture represents these relations and how such representations often differ markedly from those produced by subordinate or marginal groups within the same culture.

The materialist paradigm has been represented most consistently by scholars who focus on class, capitalism, and the state in Western culture, where power is depicted as a hierarchical, controlling, all-pervasive force. The greatest power is exercised through a dominating social class, but in contemporary analyses the term "class" is usually mitigated by gender, sexual orientation, color, age, or other physical characteristics, or by ethnic origin, occupation, income, language, religion, or geographical region.

In classical Marxism, power was anchored in capitalism as the fundamental organizing principle in modern society. Capitalism was characterized as a mode of production that produced a hierarchy of classes and led inevitably to conflict among classes. This characterization led to analyses of the values generated by capitalism as a mode of production. Marx (1977), for example, argued that commodities in a capitalist system embody and signify the values placed on the workers who produce and exchange these commodities. Capitalism depends for survival on the creation of inequalities in human value and the exploitation of the many for the benefit of the few.

Other theorists (e.g., Miliband, 1969; Poulantzas, 1973; Braman, 1995) established the conditions for an autonomous, democratic state within the Marxist tradition, and they reconstructed modes-of-production analyses for premodern, pre-capitalist, and modern, industrial cultures; revitalized critical perspectives about capitalism's development; reconceptualized questions of segmented and centralized states before the modern era; and provided insights about how and why certain premodern and modern cultural practices intersect in postmodern cultures. These insights have had some impact on media studies (e.g., Melkote, 1991; Mohammadi, 1997).

The parameters of Paradigm I were explored by 19th and early 20th century theorists, when the study of modern culture was centered in and on Western Europe, and the margins of modernity radiated to Eurocentric peripheries like North America. The paradigm has been enriched immensely in 20th Century debates by scholars representing various positions in the critical tradition—non-Marxist and Marxist—who have sought to revise, reformulate, and even reorder the theoretical building blocks of material culture.

Paradigm I researchers in media studies have been influenced by two seminal interpretations of the materialist condition. First, the Italian theorist-activist Antonio Gramsci (see Hoare & Smith, 1971, and Forgacs, 1988) and his disciples sought to explain how hegemony functions in modern, industrial democracies. Second, French and British cultural theorists (e.g., Althusser & Balibar, 1970; Williams, 1980; Thompson, 1984; and Hall, 1989) attempted to establish the conditions for a semi-autonomous ideology within the framework of Williams' (1980) "cultural materialism."

Analyses of hegemonic cultures were used initially to explain how the capitalist class in a modern, democratic state was forced to rely on consensus more than coercion to contain dissent. Gramsci concluded that the state was comprised of more than political, administrative, legislative, and judicial institutions. It also embraced public and private cultural institutions—the real arbiters of a hegemonic consensus that consigned power to the dominant class. These institutions included the family, schools, labor unions, and the mass media. They represented the agencies of persuasion, and they could be contrasted with the agencies of coercion controlled by the state—the administrative bureaucracy; military, police, judiciary, and penal authorities; and the tax system.

The hegemonic state is a unifying force, mediating conflict while actively and positively seeking support from the citizenry. Modern capitalist states are hegemonic, but hegemony demands constant attention as it can be won and lost. Cultural institutions must legitimize the hegemonic order in the consciousness and in the actions of dominant and subordinate social classes, even though these hegemonic discourses often conflict with the personal experiences of those who are in subordinate positions. Hegemonic cultures can range from closed systems, in which dissenters lack even the language necessary to organize resistance, to open systems, in which "the capability for resistance flourishes and may lead to the creation of counterhegemonic alternatives" (Lears, 1985, p. 574).

Hegemony is achieved when what is represented as social *reality*—with its boundaries of belief and behavior—is framed by elite groups who seek the support of other groups. The triumph of an industrial, capitalist culture organized by and on behalf of the bourgeoisie is the textbook example of successful hegemony. Since cultures are constructed partially from their rhetorics, it is crucial to study the role of language in a hegemonic system. If citizens are conditioned mainly by the symbolic systems of those who govern, then a hegemonic order is maintained in part through the communication of a coherent ideology that reflects these interests and needs.

The mechanisms that ultimately confirm or deny a hegemonic order, then, are symbolic and material even in a materialist paradigm of modern culture. In essence, culture is expressed as ideological discourse (e.g., Larraine, 1979; Thompson, 1984; Eagleton, 1991). The configurations of power and resistance are found in the interrelationships among material forces and their ideological forms. Ideologies are inscribed in the language of personal and public discourse. Many ideologies are present in a hegemonic culture, and discourses compete with, and borrow from, each other in the struggle to confer meaning on human experience.

French philosopher Louis Althusser (e.g., 1971) was among the first of the critical, Marxist scholars to establish conditions for a semi-autonomous ideology, and the analysis of ideology by Hall, an interpreter and critic of the Althusserian position, has substantially influenced the application of the materialist paradigm in communication research:

> By ideology I mean the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works. [But ideology also involves] the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world, arise, which move the masses of the people into historical action against the prevailing system (Hall, 1983, p. 59).

Dominant ideologies seek to secure hegemony, but they cannot guarantee ideological consensus: "The notion of *the* dominant ideology and *the* subordinated ideology is an inadequate way of representing the complex interplay of different ideological discourses" (Hall, 1985, p. 104).

Hall rejects the classical Marxist position that material conditions have preordained realities of their own—that, for instance, each social class has a distinct ideology, or that the position of a social class in a capitalist society somehow shapes, sets boundaries for, or gives expression to its own ideology. But he stops short of Paradigm II positions that assume there is no way to live apart from the conditions that we experience through cultural norms. The conditions of material life exist as an objective reality independent of mind, but they can be conceptualized only in the mind, as an ideological representation (Hall, 1985). Language is an arena of struggle, the "war of position" outlined by Gramsci, between ideological referents that may affirm or deny a cultural order (Hall, 1983). In the process, individuals consume and interpolate elements of numerous ideologies in the ongoing process of making sense of the world.

Ideological discourses condition our perceptions of reality from early childhood, but the relationship between ideology and status is not predetermined. Even so, the power to assign alternative meanings to our experiences is realized only through ideological struggle. There are preferred meanings in ideological discourse, but no ideological meaning is immutable. Despite differences among theorists, Paradigm I theories of ideology all share the premise that ideology stems from material relations and seeks to give them legitimacy as "the way of the world."

Paradigm II: Culture as a symbolic system

Paradigm II advocates assume that a culture is primarily a symbolic system. The conditions of existence are meaningful only in the ways in which individuals interpret and represent these conditions to themselves and to others. Scholars do not deny the importance of material conditions, but they focus on the cultural codes that comprise the symbolic system—codes whose meanings (in art, religion, architecture, law, media, sports, farming, manufacturing, or any other social activity) may not be available to, or provide the same power to, all members of society. The symbolic system itself is a crucial site in which power may be exercised, contested, negotiated, or resisted.

The primary focus in Paradigm I is on a collective category (e.g., a nation state, an institution, or a social class, gender, or religious group), while the focus in Paradigm II is on the "collective subject." Whereas Paradigm I theorists examine culture as the object of inquiry, Paradigm II adherents analyze culture as a subjectivity whose "text" is the culture itself and, therefore, is inseparable from it. A culture's communicative texts are found in clothes, music, dance, youth gangs, and the mass media. They also embrace the persuasive institutions of civil society and the coercive institutions of the state. Whereas power in Paradigm I usually is constructed hierarchically (as in the capitalist class or the patriarchal discourse) and is perceived as a singular signifying and social practice (as in the dominant ideology), Paradigm II scholars assume that the media through which power is exercised—beginning with language—is unstable and subject to critique and confrontation.

The symbolic system is omnipresent, and individuals cannot transcend their cultures because the codes embedded in symbolic systems determine the ways they think, feel, experience, and act. One cannot achieve the "objective" perspective idealized by scholars reared in the Enlightenment tradition. Paradigm II researchers must develop strategies that examine their own positions within power relationships, since they cannot position themselves entirely outside the systems they are studying. Their strategies must take the form, at least in part, of self-critiques.

Some Paradigm II theorists tend to see the symbolic system as a unified, internally consistent, organic whole. Thus there is an implicit premise even in Paradigm II that power can be characterized in terms of hegemony. Other Paradigm II theorists emphasize locally differentiated, often fragmented, symbolic systems in which we express and experience culture. Power may take forms that are localized, autonomous, ambiguous, and even contradictory. When power is contested, the theater of struggle is a specific stage with specific actors and a specific script.

Paradigm II, then, has undergone a crisis in the tension between its modernist and postmodernist versions. The modernist version—whose cultural dominance extended at least through the mid-20th Century—formed a critique of many rationalist and idealist tendencies of the 18th and 19th centuries, but it retained the Enlightenment focus on the centered subject as an article of faith in Western thought. Postmodernism, with its theme of the decentered subject, was emerging by the 1960s and early 1970s as a powerful competitor that threatened to "deconstruct" Western thought.

Modernist (also structuralist and constructionist) positions envision a subject who discovers or creates—or seeks to discover or create—meaning in a condition of anxiety. Received or traditional meanings may seem to have lost their claim to certainty, but there is yet a centered self who can discover or create meaning—or at least orchestrate differences in meaning. Modern culture consists of such centers of meaning, despite persistent anxiety that meaning is undiscoverable in any ultimate sense. A desire for a universal system of meaning persists in the midst of modernity in all its non-authoritarian and authoritarian forms. This version of Paradigm II shares with Paradigm I the premise of the self as a center of meaning, though the conditions of possibility for the self in Paradigm I would be determined by forces apart from the self.

Postmodern (and poststructuralist) scholars assert that the subject has been displaced as the center of meaning in postmodern culture and is no longer conceived as a private space to be protected from "outside" intrusions. The individual has been largely colonized by a mass culture that has no center. The self does not speak its "own" language but has become a medium through whom different languages and voices circulate. All metanarratives, or grand constructions of meaning, are deeply suspect. "Meaning" is a game with endless moves. Alternatively, any hope for meaning must abandon universality and seek only some local, limited, contingent, and forever partial meaning.

Despite these differences, Paradigm II suggests that the texts of modern or postmodern culture are represented in the signifying (languages, rhetorics, discourses, signs) and social practices (habits, routines, etiquettes, protocols, rituals) of everyday life. Scholars have examined the relationship between language and our experience of the world—in theories about grammar, about speech, about what we mean when we speak and write. Paradigm II has been influenced by linguistic studies, in which language (or any language-like activity) is the primary site of meaning. Language, including the ways in which we study language, is the point of entry into the study of culture.

Most strategies employing this paradigm have been influenced by literary theorists, who challenge the notion of fixed meanings in language. Culture is essentially "text," and a cultural text is conditioned by signifying and social practices specific to that text. Modernists may argue for "formal" readings—where the reader presumes a certain stability of language—but even these scholars assume there are no fixed readings of text. In deconstructionist theory, formalism leads in the opposite direction—toward a kind of anti-formalism (e.g., Derrida,1976; Kamuf, 1991). Here the reading of a text presumes that (1) language properties (e.g., grammar rules, speech acts) are arbitrary; (2) the boundaries of a formal, self-enclosed, symbolic system will deteriorate; and (3) the meaning of a text is constantly deconstructed despite efforts to construct meaning in and through it.

Postmodernists argue against "formal" readings, because such stability is a consequence of remaining within specified frames of reference. Adapting ideas from Freud, theorists (e.g., Lévi-Strauss, 1973, 1975; Jameson, 1991; and Geertz, 1973, 1983) argue for "symptomatic" or "diagnostic" readings that look for the underlying, perhaps unconscious, meanings or messages in the narratives and rituals of a culture. It is just as important—perhaps even more important—to decode meanings that are obscured, distorted, repressed, or concealed as it is to recognize meanings that are manifest in cultural expression and representation. Even where there is no intention to deceive or mislead, a "symptomatic" reading may reveal much about the implicit, unconscious functions of cultural coding and their implications for cultural power.

Paradigm II debates appropriated by mass communication scholars and students have tended to focus on specific issues raised by theorists in a tradition that extends to the Victorian Era (Taylor, 1986). Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), for example, seeks to categorize the languages of cultural capital (see also Harker, Mahar & Wilkes, 1990, and Johnson, 1993). Historian Henri Lefebvre (1971) analyzes the power, generally unrecognized, of the languages of the everyday (see also Burke, 1990). Cultural theorists Jean Francois Lyotard (1984, 1993), Jean Baudrillard (1981), Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1977), and C. V. Boundas (1993) try to account for the effacing, or at least the fragmentation, of the postmodern subject. African-American scholars Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West (e.g., 1996); social critic Ruth Frankenberg (1993); and social historian Noel Ignatiev (1995) seek to define the mechanisms by which "race" has been socially constructed in America to distribute power unevenly along designated racial lines.[2]

Paradigm II scholars of the postmodern persuasion are wary of all overarching, totalizing narratives, and they find difficulty in determining with finality the meaning of any cultural text. They may endlessly defer a decision about what something means because they see no stable point of reference for such a decision. The language "deconstructs" the very structures we try to construct. This does not mean there are no possibilities for meaning, but that there are many possibilities. This logic, however, is applicable only within the artificially encapsulated world of language. It is not terribly convincing when language is viewed as a set of social practices.

Critical literature and the mass communicator

Scholars, students, and teachers in journalism and mass communication can usefully employ dialectically the insights of both paradigms in developing procedures for examining the media. It is not realistic or useful to rely on only one paradigm, for *neither alone* can adequately address the ways in which language, text, and community shape and reshape the conditions under which, for example, news issues are discussed, or even whether they are discussable. Nor does the "truth" lie somewhere along the divide between a culture's material and symbolic realities. What one paradigm reveals, the other tends to obscure. Material systems assume symbolic forms, and symbolic systems are integral to material practices. However, one can identify ways in which the paradigms can be applied to stimulate thought and debate, and, perhaps, to answer some questions about mass communication. Just a few of the areas in which the paradigms are useful are discussed here.

Language and power. Communicative acts are governed by language, and our sense of self—of who we are and what is real—is determined in the first instance by language, which is composed of many voices. The structuralist view of language, epitomized by Ferdinand de Saussure (1983), has prevailed for much of the 20th Century. De Saussure argued that all social relations are defined primarily by language and that words mean what they do only because individuals, as members of a language community, agree to assign certain meanings to them.

De Saussure viewed language in part as binary signs, in which words, for example, are assigned values in terms of their opposition to other words. De Saussure's many interpreters (e.g., Harris, 1987; Thibault, 1997) often have taken this insight beyond de Saussure, asserting that the principles that structure language systems often structure other symbolic systems that generate meaning. The power of news texts, for example, lies in the power to confer meaning on persons, events, or issues that are appropriated for public consumption. Mass media news—in newspapers, magazines, radio, television—is primarily a dichotomous discourse that presumes a stable language. News production, by definition, seeks to secure fixed readings of the text, and audience surveys serve mainly to determine whether these preferred readings are understood and accepted.[3]

News texts are grounded in a world of binary signs—of life and death, subject and object, male and female, white and black, pure and impure, legitimate and illegitimate, sane and insane, sacred and profane, capitalist and communist, metropole and periphery. The dichotomies are endless, and Eagleton (e.g., 1991) argues that such oppositions, along with the apparent need to see the world in terms of oppositions, provide the social-psychological basis for ideology.

The poststructuralist view of language—epitomized by postmodernists like Derrida (e.g., 1976) and the deconstructionists—criticized de Saussure and the structuralists for fostering a false sense of stability and unity in language systems. Poststructuralists assume language is arbitrary, and any imposition of an "authorized" or "official" reading of a text is an exercise of power. Meaning is conveyed not by the language but by the power to persuade or compel an individual or community to accept a meaning as true (or preferred). All language (from mathematics to religion to journalism) eludes efforts to make it stand still. Thus, media content is unstable and subject to criticism.

Some mass communication scholars have also tried to apply the ideas of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, who, like many poststructuralists, assumes that words never provide the fixed, unalterable meanings we ascribe to them. Bakhtin (1981) employed the terms "monologic" and "dialogic" to express the tension between ideological conformity and diversity in texts (see also Holquist, 1990). The monologic voice is the hierarchical, authoritarian voice, the privileged language or discourse (anything from a privileged dialect to a privileged social class), the univocal, ideological perspective communicated in the text. At its most extreme, as in a totalitarian society, the monologic voice is the voice of all, and all speak with one voice. Dialogic voicing consists of a plurality of discourses, of ideologies—the multiple voices characteristic of democratic society.

For Bakhtin, this theory of discourse is ultimately a grand conception of history, one in which the dialogic struggles to exceed the power of the monologic and to usher in a new democratic order. All texts exhibit tension between the monologic and the dialogic. They operate in a dialectical relationship fraught with struggle. News texts, to paraphrase Bakhtin, should be viewed in light of this struggle.

Mass communication scholars and students may pose, on the basis of these analyses of language, several useful questions or propositions. One question centers on the impact of an unstable language on communication effectiveness. If meanings shift, how can one know when he or she is using langage that has shared meaning? Other questions center on who determines what words mean and how the arbiter uses the power to assign meaning (e.g., to perpetuate a political, social, or cultural status quo, or to effect change). Scholars and students should look for messages within news texts that appear to privilege certain cultural practices and denigrate, silence, or diminish other cultural practices. And they should consider alternative and preferred readings of texts. A preferred reading may represent primarily hegemonic discourses, but the researcher still needs to identify the strategies that are employed to make the social order appear normal and the norms and conditions that are necessary for a preferred reading to be either accepting or critical of that order.

Text and power. Mass communication is an enormously powerful symbolic force, and this power stems in large part from the narrative power of these texts. While there is a considerable literature about the narrative form, we are concerned mainly with what some fiction writers and journalists refer to critically as the "realistic" narrative (e.g., Eason, 1990; Mumby, 1993; Berger, 1996). This is a genre of story telling associated with the making of various kinds of cultural texts, where information and ideas about people, events, or situations, past and present, are categorized, prioritized, and condensed into linear, chronological accounts that claim authority and public currency, impute cause and agency, and assert their own truths.

Realistic narratives assume there is a "true," or at least a distinct, social reality waiting to be discovered, and communicator and audience share a consensus about how this reality should be comprehended, packaged, and presented. Realistic writers explain their subject matter—no matter how alien or bizarre it might seem—in terms that can be communicated to a shared culture. Realistic narratives tend to naturalize differing views of reality within conventions that are in harmony with the shared view. The diversity and relativity of modern culture do not pose problems, because these disparate images mask underlying codes that unify and indemnify the social order.

Realistic narratives, however, employ codes not only for what is represented, but also for the process of representation itself. Events, for example, do not constitute a narrative, and it is not self-evident that they must be understood or represented only in a narrative form. But if we choose to narrate events, we also choose, knowingly or unknowingly, to endow these events with meaning. We shape events into plots, and we find meaning in the plots. Narratives follow plots that foreground some persons, issues, or events, while shifting others to the background—or off the page. This process, together with the stated or implied direction of the narrative, represents an exercise of power that makes the generation of meaning in any narrative inescapable. Consequently, it is naive to assume that realistic narratives simply describe "what is there" without acknowledging that they are constructed for certain purposes, fulfill certain conditions, and appeal to certain norms so that audiences will accept the representations as real.

In applying these ideas to mass communication, one might conclude that news is first and foremost about personalities, events, and issues of primary interest to the brokers of power in American society. News represents the dominant culture, and the production process itself is a powerful force in legitimizing this news. Even in the era of globalization, for example, domestic news is valued over foreign news; foreign news with an American presence is valued over foreign news without an American presence; and foreign news that is in harmony with U.S. domestic agendas is valued over foreign news that deviates from these agendas.

Community and power. Communication usually takes place within a community whose norms govern both the nature and effectiveness of the communicative act. A community (linguistic, geographical, ethnic, professional, political, religious) will shape the conditions—both enabling and limiting, stated and unstated, signifying and social—that affect the ways in which persons communicate—or don't communicate. The material and symbolic conditions within a community give rise to communal narratives that can be applied to the study of communication. While narratives vary from one context to another, they apply whether the speaker is a preacher in church, a singer at a folk festival, an alcoholic at an AA meeting, a child on a playground—or a journalist writing a story.

Habermas (1989), who advocated an approach to studying the relationship between community and power that has influenced media studies, examined the roots in Western culture of what he called the "public sphere"—a term that refers to that place in social life where public opinion is formed (see also Seidman, 1989). Habermas studied the public languages, gestures, mannerisms, etiquettes, educations, fashions, and other socially bound activities that were employed to gain access to bourgeois life in Western Europe between the 17th and 19th centuries.

The public sphere, a space distinct from civil society and the state, was organized by and for the bourgeoisie. Habermas argued that the bourgeoisie fostered a distinction between "private" and "public" spheres in their social practices and negotiated a public sphere for themselves. The public sphere constituted the nation's middle-class, and, from the beginning, among the most important components in the creation of a "bourgeois public sphere" was the newspaper, which played a crucial role in developing the language of public debate about what constituted public issues: "The press remained an institution of the public itself, operating to provide and intensify public discussion, no longer a mere organ for the conveyance of information, but not yet a medium of consumer culture" (Seidman, 1989, pp. 233-234).

The bourgeois public sphere became the mode for communicating knowledge. It presumed a world of individuals—unified, centered subjects—who were almost always male and of the privileged social class, and whose public language reflected education, social position, and entitlements to which only a few had access. Members of this community employed in their speech and writing sociolinguistic features that emphasized clarity, coherence, organization, evenness, willingness to compromise, and a "middling" style of expression appropriate to the emerging middle classes. After the standards of linguistic correctness—especially grammatical correctness—were agreed upon, the ways in which one could recognize and certify who was (or was not) a member of the community were known. Now there was an objective measure to verify one was a "person of position and quality."

The bourgeois public sphere in Western culture steadily weakened during the 20th Century. The social networks that had been the preserve of the middle classes (e.g., in education, speech, manners, recreation, business) were gradually undermined by the forces of modernity—spearheaded by the mass media—that had made possible the establishment of a bourgeois public sphere in the first place. The weakening of the bourgeois public sphere has had fundamental implications for media studies.

Foucault (e.g., 1977, 1978, 1980) developed another approach to the study of community and power that also has influenced media studies. Foucault, who examined the discourses of power and the steady erosion of the private sphere, rejected the concept of power as an external, hierarchical, imposed force and supported the view that such social categories as class, gender, ethnic origin, or religious persuasion were essentially arbitrary. He favored a concept of power that was polymorphous and internalized in the theater of the human body. History, for example, is not a set of imposed facts and ideas or simply a series of "real" events. It contains numerous discourses that are read and reread by successive generations consumed by the task of reinventing their own lives.

Foucault's insights into the meaning of power and empowerment in the private sphere—in an individual's thoughts and actions—have had a profound impact on our understanding of the individual-in-community. His analyses of life in Western Europe between the 17th and 19th centuries (prisons, poor houses, medical practices, state bureaucracies) suggest that information gathering—the keeping of records—became the principal means by which the modern state learned to maintain control through surveillance of its citizens.

Foucault's arguments support some enduring themes in the creation of a hegemonic order within a community: Individuals are controlled by the symbolic systems of those who rule, and it is difficult to resist these systems. The state ensures compliance by relying not on overt repression but on powerful institutions that establish routines of social control to which we are enculturated. Foucault documented many kinds of regimentation—a largely invisible form of surveillance—in which we are observed, and we behave like we are being observed even when we are not.

There can be no transforming revolutions for Foucault. Resistance is a matter of daily practice, and the human body is the field on which the struggle for discursive power is waged. In this sense, Foucault has fundamentally altered our sense of resistance. The ultimate objective is control over the body—a control that is mediated primarily through the discourse(s) we employ to live in community. These mediations, which Foucault calls regimes of power, seek to monitor the discourses that live within us and that regulate daily life. The first step toward resisting such control is to analyze and deconstruct the socially constructed concepts that have been naturalized in everyday life.

Communicators need to pay more attention to how news supports the hegemonic order—on how news is managed by official (usually government) news sources and is pre-packaged in syndicated features, opinion pieces, and advice columns, and in wire service news reports. Even local news generated by reporters covering the police, courts, city council, and other community "beats" often is obtained in a pre-packaged format (e.g., official reports, statements, minutes of meetings, records). Journalists rely increasingly on other sources of managed material disguised as news and derived mainly from powerful, but non-official, special-interest lobby groups (e.g., political action committees) that typically represent the dominant elites.

The quest for a reformist "public journalism" that ostensibly seeks to reestablish dialogue between journalists and their missing publics (i.e., vanishing audiences) may, in fact, lead to nothing more than increased hegemony by society's dominant elites. Hanno Hardt, for example, critiqued the movement toward public journalism in a review essay:

> Discussions of public or civic journalism . . . . appear as a rhetoric of change that claims neither theoretical depth nor historical consciousness. . . . Missing is a critical examination of the underlying assumptions of journalism, professionalism, and freedom of expression, particularly in

> light of historical, social, political, and economic developments that continue to deconstruct traditional views of journalism and are leading to a different understanding of the role of journalism in American society (Hardt, 1997, pp. 103-104).

It is also useful to focus on how readers interpret and use news. Do they recognize culturally preferred readings of the news as reflecting a dominant discourse? Do they respond positively or negatively to deviant readings? Audience analysis should attempt to identify the existence of alternative, community-based news sources and determine the extent to which readers have access to and make use of these sources.

Corporate culture. News is constructed within a corporate culture that is not unlike the cultures of non-media corporations. It is selected with reference to a matrix of values, and it is packaged and distributed as a commodity. The production process is characterized by a hierarchical system with clear lines of authority and procedures for rewarding and punishing employees. As cultural workers, journalists are guided by professional practices, customs, and codes of conduct to produce stories that will be read and viewed by consumers. News produced as a commodity is essentially ritualized news: News sources, news stories, and news events are predictable, repeatable, and in continuous production. Ritualized reporting and writing codes reduce reality to discrete, dichotomous "facts" that are compartmentalized and endlessly replicated. Ritualized news has become increasingly personalized as "celebrity" news about persons, places, and events.

Media critics, journalists, and audiences typically assume that the rituals commit journalists to searches for unmediated, objective realities. Journalists are presumed to avoid propaganda and bias, which are perceived as deviations from some objective truth. Professional codes demand that facts be separated from opinion and news reports be written in an objective or unbiased (read balanced, fair) manner. Some argue that the so-called cult of objectivity has greatly enhanced the power of news to misrepresent, stereotype, trivialize, and sensationalize the news agenda. Some journalists, for example, assume that most news issues can be reduced to two opposing sides. If both sides are presented, the news story is unbiased. But what if the story has three or four sides, and what if one of the sides that is reported is misleading?

The quest for objectivity must not be abandoned, because it would be impossible for society to make informed decisions if everyone gave up the search for fair, balanced, accurate information. That objectivity is valued is evidenced by the vigorous response against postmodernist attacks on objective scientific inquiry (e.g., Sokal and Bricmont, 1998; Koertge, 1998; and Gross, Levitt, and Lewis, 1996) and the furor over the inaccuracies in Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu's (1984) memoir describing horrific violence against Guatemalan Indians. "Objectivity" is complex, however, and discussions of its meaning must be anchored in historically specific, cultural environments.

The media are closely linked to and dependent on other powerful corporate institutions (at local, state, national, and international levels), but these relationships are generally represented by the media as necessary and beneficial to the public. Mutual dependency is justified by the claim that institutions need each other: Mass media receive information supplied by various official (public sector) and unofficial (private sector) sources, assign value to this information, and transmit some of these messages to audiences. Journalists often claim they occupy independent positions in the production process. Defining themselves as members of the Fourth Estate, most journalists claim rights of free speech and the public's right to know under the First Amendment, and are wary of attempts to infringe on these rights. Journalists argue that they themselves are the best guarantee that news accounts will be honest, responsible, and impartial—and in the public interest.

The critical literature suggests that it would be useful for scholars and teachers to focus on a medium's relative position in the corporate body (for example, it may be the flagship in a chain of newspapers and television stations); on the values and priorities of those who control the medium's news and business operations; on social and professional news practices that influence news production; and on the news workers as a subset of the journalistic community (including the administrative status, social background, news values, and priorities of the journalists; their perceptions of the news selection process; and the constraints they face inside the newsroom).

Privileged news. Media scholars who embrace a materialist paradigm of media and culture (Paradigm I) seek above all to demonstrate that the media communicate "structures of meaning" that over time promote and perpetuate the ideas and activities of a hegemonic social order (e.g., Turner, 1990). The media serve primarily a hegemonic class, even though conceptualizing this class (using value-laden variables linked to perceptions of belief and behavior and to demographic variables like socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation, or color), defining the boundaries of this class, and determining how it operates is not as easy as it was before the 20th Century, when culture was in a mercantile, or early industrial, phase and the printed word was the dominant mass medium.

For Paradigm I researchers, then, mass communicators typically frame reality in ways that are in harmony with the interests and needs of those who wield power in this designated middle-class order, and they produce "privileged news." Hegemonic, ideological perspectives dominate news, and are embedded in the language of private and commercial media, and non-commercial and government-owned media. In a materialist paradigm, mass media have the power to represent reality in harmony with the hegemonic order: "[A] given symbolic universe, if it becomes hegemonic, can serve the interests of some groups better than others. Subordinate groups may participate in maintaining a symbolic universe, even if it serves to legitimate their domination. In other words, they can share a kind of half-conscious complicity in their own victimization" (Lears, 1985, p. 573).

While some news reflects hegemonic values more powerfully than other news, enculturation ensures that hegemonic values will play a major role in structuring journalists' understanding of the meaning of news texts. News that deviates from or conflicts with hegemonic messages (i.e., privileged news) is present in the media, but these counter-hegemonic messages are conditioned by, if not controlled by, the dominant culture. In effect, alternative discourses are necessarily structured in the context of the hegemonic discourse. The experiences of subordinate communities are given a public force by intermediaries situated within these dominant institutions.

Paradigm I researchers seek to demonstrate (1) how a dominant discourse is forged in the training and employment of journalists, and in the news production process; and (2) how communicators *and* consumers have come to share the same understanding about news, which helps to create and sustain a hegemonic consensus.

Paradigm I representations of news texts, however, are incomplete and perhaps flawed for at least two reasons. First, the assumption that counter-hegemonic messages can have meaning only in relation to hegemonic messages poses problems for the researcher seeking autonomy for these dissident voices. "The notion of hegemony," as Hall says, "is *not* the old notion of determinism in a new disguise, for it refuses to ascribe the positions of power, whether in discourse or across the whole social formation, permanently to anybody" (Hall, 1989, pp. 51-52).

Second, researchers employing the materialist paradigm often accept a reading of news that is (1) essentially unambiguous in reflecting and representing the dominant discourse, (2) understood in the same way by communicators and consumers, and/or (3) received by individuals who have no access to or are not utilizing alternative news agencies/sources in making inferences and judgments about the *meanings* of news. In essence, Paradigm I researchers target a specific audience in the text itself, which poses problems for the researcher who seeks a hermeneutic interpretation of the text.[4] The media (or the sources on which they rely) may establish an agenda for debate, but they may not dictate what their audiences think about the agenda.

Scholars who embrace a symbolic paradigm of media and culture (Paradigm II) are more sensitive to these problems. The media alone do not set communal norms for the acceptability, credibility, or authority of the news. Nor are these norms set only by powerful political and economic institutions, which would determine what the media produce or the public consumes. In its top-down view of news as manipulation, Paradigm I recognizes the exercise of power over and through the news media, but it rarely recognizes that news institutions themselves operate within a much larger network of linguistic, textual, and communal norms.

The communal norms for the *effectiveness* of news derive from a complex interplay of many cultural forces, both official and unofficial, which shape what counts as news in a culture. Journalistic texts—the discourses ritualized in the news production process and communicated by media workers—must be examined in relation to other cultural texts that service the media (in music, art, religion, education, business, government), along with the organizational cultures that produce these texts. Journalists, for example, may be trained and employed as professionals to privilege consensus news, but it doesn't necessarily follow that they always perform this task.

Privileged news (i.e., typical news) is legitimized in part by contrast with news that is perceived to deviate from the social order. Deviant news (i.e., atypical news) highlights stories that transgress dominant values/norms enshrined in law, custom, and convention. Atypical stories are contrasted with typical stories, as in illegal drug use versus legal drug use, single-parent families headed by women versus two-parent families headed by men, multicultural issues versus monocultural issues.

Deviant news. Scholars who conceive of culture as a symbolic system assume that news represents numerous monologic and dialogic voices. They seek to demonstrate how texts constitute crucial but ambiguous sites of linguistic struggle. Various strategies are employed to interrogate the omissions, multiple meanings, alternative sources, and subjects of inquiry in news, and they are used to negotiate, challenge, contradict, or even confront dominant discourses. Such strategies may illuminate not only the power of hegemonic groups but also the relative autonomy of subordinated political, ethnic, religious, cultural, or socio-economic groups—as revealed in their own texts and in their readings of dominant news texts.

Paradigm II researchers also emphasize the audience's susceptibility to news texts, but these scholars often assume that all culture is "textual"—consumers are studied as functionaries within a text-producing, text-circulating, text-interpreting system. Such textual analysis often leads to brilliant insights, but social relations are effectively reduced to textual relations. It needs to be combined with strategies—ethnography, social science, oral network analyses—that can decode audience responses to news in the context of communal narratives that make such messages effective.

Mass communication scholars and students should examine sources of news that deviate from consensual texts generated by the media. The levels of alienation, particularly in subaltern communities, are often difficult to assess, but this may be crucial in audience analysis. Deviant messages may be present in personal, everyday activities; in interpersonal networks hidden from public scrutiny; in community structures that are not controlled by the dominant culture. The objective is to determine (1) the nature of alternative news narratives (if any) originating from within the subculture, and (2) the role that subcultural oral, written, or visual texts may play in determining the credibility of news and opinion. The point of the exercise is to show not only how news can be deconstructed and reconstructed as dominant and deviant discourses but also to place these narratives in localized, communal contexts that do not necessarily service the dominant culture.

Deviant news, which is essentially negative, is most likely to be misrepresented, stereotyped, trivialized, and sensationalized. The more remote news is from the experiences of local news consumers, the more deviant, negative news tends to distort the news agenda—as in the stereotypical representations of most non-western cultures (e.g., Hawk, 1992). Deviant news is also demonized news that increasingly is exploited to trigger moral panics (e.g., drug use, child abuse, illegal immigration, sexual harassment, juvenile crime).

Integrating critical literature and approaches

We do not argue that journalism and mass communication scholars and teachers should abandon all other approaches as they integrate critical literature into their curricula and research. We do argue that the antagonism cited by Carey (1975) and Goldman (1990) toward critical literature harms the academic enterprise and must be abandoned, and that the *best* of the critical literature must be incorporated into journalism and mass communication research and education.

The overarching value of critical literature is that it can be used to help scholars and teachers decide what mass communication education and research should be in the 21st Century. New approaches and methods have been debated for years, and while one sees evidence of change in the breadth of scholarship published and presented, there has been no wholesale transformation of the curriculum (Rakow, 1993). Faculties continue to find themselves mired in conceptual poverty, unsure about what the discipline is or should be.

Finding its identity has always been problematic for communication, according to Swanson (1993), but the problem is more accute today, given the scarcity of resources and the continuing pressures to restructure the academy. Communication faculties now face ". . .an urgent need to articulate the scholarly focus of our discipline to others within the university, rather than allowing them to think that we exist merely to create effective communicators" (Shoemaker, 1993, p. 147). The traditionally dominant approach has been to train communicators for business and industry jobs, but programs must insure that these interests are not served above all others. "A university should serve the interests of the public, first and foremost, rather than those parts of society with the most money and influence" (Rakow, 1993, p. 155).

Critical literature—which is not tied to conventional, occupational classifications—provides an overview of mass communication that stimulates new thinking and that can help faculties produce more holistic programs—programs that break down barriers among sequences, for example, and that help them become integrated. Mass communication research and education in the next century must focus on the total communication context, not only on isolated industries, or even segments of industries, as in the present and past. Appropriate, constructive criticism based on critical literature (and on other literatures) must be an important part of communication research and education, and efforts must be made to bring students and faculty together to discuss questions (e.g., the instability of language) that have important implications for print and broadcast journalists, for public relations practitioners, for advertisers, for organizational communicators, for everyone in communication. They should discuss the ways in which meaning is determined by powerful forces, and what the implications are for practitioners in all areas. This approach should be made part of the thrust, part of the goals, of communication education and research in the next century.

More specifically, we believe critical literature should be integrated horizontally, rather than vertically. Indeed, it *cannot* be successfully integrated vertically because it would remain off to itself, talking to itself, and have little impact on the rest of the curriculum or on the research mission. Critical literature must be included in required media history, media and society, and law and ethics courses. Discussion of the kinds of issues critical theorists have raised would enrich these courses and help them become part of a larger debate. Richard Jensen for example, teaches a class that links law and ethics to the distribution of power in society, and that addresses fundamental questions of justice (Allen & Jensen, 1995).

We also advocate critical approaches in the teaching of communication theory and research. Like Goldman (1990), who has developed an undergraduate theory course that exposes students to alternative frames of critical thinking and that analyzes scholarship from a humanist/critical perspective, we would supplement, rather than discard, old approaches of proven value.

Critical literature can also enrich reporting, and editing classes. At the University of Houston, for example, we expose students to a critique of objectivity and to some of the counter arguments, and we have students employ critical perspectives as they examine media content. Students often see for themselves that a report appears to be objective but in fact is not because important voices have not been heard. Or they discover for themselves how media help preserve the hegemonic order.

A Center for Critical Cultural Studies was created at the University of Houston in part to address the problem of integrating critical literature into research and teaching. A joint project of the School of Communication and the Department of English, the center sponsored university-wide seminars and workshops for faculty and students in a quest to address some of these issues. Communication became a component in an ever-expanding agenda that encompassed a variety of disciplines in the humanities, social and natural sciences, law, and, on occasion, business and engineering. The topics included postmodernism and sexuality, race and identity, the culture of late capitalism, the new historicism, critical literary studies, and methodology in cultural studies. There were seminars on encounters between the humanities and sciences—on chaos theory, on the impact of critical theory on the natural sciences, on technology and art in early modern Europe, on paradigmatic changes in "modern" physics and the arts, and on issues relating to photography, film studies, and the "developing" world.

These discussions had an impact not only on research but also on teaching. The School of Communication created seven undergraduate and graduate courses that employ critical literature to explore (1) the frameworks (linguistic, literary, historical, political, economic) that help condition the roles played by communication agents and agencies in society, and (2) the daily social and ethical challenges that must be addressed in preparing for careers in today's communication professions.

The offerings include two critical theory courses—one at the undergraduate level, media, power, and society, and one at the graduate level, critical theory in media and culture. Both courses explore the processes involved in constructing, representing, resisting, and deconstructing culture. The undergraduate course is organized around the relationship between communication, representations of reality, and relations of power in contemporary culture. The graduate course offers an analysis and critique of premodern, modern, and postmodern paradigms of culture, and generates procedures for analyzing media texts in contemporary metropolitan environments.

The urgency of developing a more effective nexus between critical theory and practice—especially in required core courses and in the relationship between undergraduate and graduate-level work—is becoming apparent as the conceptual frameworks and technological tools we have traditionally used to define, describe, interpret, and evaluate various forms of mediated activity are rapidly changing. These conversations are desperately needed if we are to prepare our students for the many challenges they will face as mass media communicators and consumers in the new century.

Endnotes

1. The most sustained critique of the two paradigms is found in the work of feminist scholars andactivists. While we do not have the space even to summarize this literature, students should be aware of feminist perspectives that have had a considerable impact on the teaching of media and cultural studies (e.g., Zoonen, 1994). The constructed opposition of male/female is rooted in cultural history. Indeed, the all-pervasive discourse of sexuality, structured as it is on gendered oppositions, is the site where we experience both the body and identity itself.

2. Some scholars fail to grasp the racist implications in the term race, which has meaning only as a social construction: One's racial identity is determined by one's community or culture. The human genetic structure accords little statistical significance to physical appearance. Distinctions between population groups based on skin color, height, hair texture, facial structure, or cranial capacity have been replaced by distinctions based on genes, gene pools, and breeding populations.

3. Critical literature about the U.S. news media has expanded dramatically, and it is far too large and diverse even to summarize here. Nevertheless, the critique of news has become a minorcultural industry in itself, and students and researchers should be seriously discussing this literature. Some studies are concerned with the meaning of news in the past (e.g., Schiller, 1981; Nord, 1990; Leonard, 1995) and the present (e.g., Cohen & Young, 1973; Cirino, 1974; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Altschull, 1984; Rachlin, 1988; Carey, 1988; Koch, 1990; Schudson, 1995; Bennett, 1996; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). They focus on news in cities, like Kaniss' remarkable studies in Philadelphia (1991, 1995); on deviant political news, like Gitlin's pioneering work on the media's role in destroying the New Left (1980); and even on influential academic news texts, like the critique of the *Four Theories of the Press* by Nerone (1995). They examine news as a civic discourse that has lost contact with its publics (e.g., Anderson, Dardenne, & Killenberg, 1994; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1996). They frame news and news institutions within a specific critical theory, as in recent applications of Habermas' concept of the public sphere to journalism (e.g., Hallin, 1994).

4. Hermeneutic scholars assume that the world and the objects of the world we study require interpretation to convey meaning. Readers approach a text as subjects filled with meaning—with facts, ideas, associations, assumptions, conditions, expectations, memories—and they find the text is also filled with meaning. The text can reinforce and enhance, or confront and contradict, our "horizons of meaning." Ideally, the meanings we bring to the text interact successfully with meanings already in the text that, in turn, are embodied in the community producing the text. For a useful summary of this position, see Outhwaite (1985).

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Source diversity after the Telecommunications Act of 1996:

Media oligarchs begin to colonize Cyberspace[1]

by

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Abstract

Through integration of different types of media, corporate conglomerations can produce a preponderance of the information and entertainment that circulates through the media. Although the Internet is often seen as being able to counteract this locus of control, by tracking corporate expansion into Cyberspace, this study shows that the Internet is the next destination for corporate colonies and raises the possibility that this new communication technology will mainly function as yet another outlet for mainstream media.

Introduction

The trend in media conglomeration has run at the speed of light over the past couple of decades, accelerated by the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996. As corporate concentration subsists in practically all major media (broadcast television, cable television, radio, newspapers, magazines, book publishers, record distributors, etc.), the Internet, on the other hand, appears to be a decentralized and undominated sphere for mass communication. Since the passage of the Act the issue over lack of source diversity seemed easily answerable by the potentialities of the Internet -- where every citizen can be a receiver, and *originator* of mass mediated information. From a critical political economy perspective, this study reviews conglomeration and lack of source diversity in the media industry since the passage of the Act, and also examines the current colonization of Cyberspace by the media empires, as well as the implications for source diversity on the Internet. By tracking corporate ownership of Internet service providers and search engines it is becoming apparent that Cyberspace effectively facilitates mainstream media, which flows through just a handful of powerful media empires. This raises a critical concern over the issue of source diversity: If the Internet cannot even provide a multiform of information and entertainment, then what can? Therefore, it is important to be acutely apprised of corporate presence on the Internet by tracking its expansion into Cyberspace, which this study begins to do.

Media empires, old and new

As media have grown throughout the history of the U.S., corporate control of them has also become greater. Communication empires began to develop in the late nineteenth century when businessmen like William Randolph Hearst multiplied their profits by putting together a chain of big-city newspapers. Since the early twentieth century, newspaper monopolies have developed into more powerful media territories as corporate presence in the communications industry has increasingly been characterized by conglomeration. Today, "the preponderance of U.S. mass communication is controlled by less than two dozen enormous profit-maximizing corporations" (McChesney, 1997, p. 6). Three of the most prominent of these conglomerates are Time-Warner, Walt Disney Company and News Corporation (Fox).

Time Warner's holdings include an imposing number of cable channels, production companies, home video and entertainment services, magazines, music companies and book publishers. To mention just a few, Time-Warner owns HBO, Cinemax, CNN, TNT, Warner Brothers television, Castle Rock Entertainment, Time-Life Video, Warner Home Video, Turner Home Satellite, *Sports Illustrated*, *People*, *Time*, *Money*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Parenting* and *Life* magazines, Elektra, Columbia House records, Time-Life Books, and Book-of-the-Month Club (*Broadcasting & Cable*, July 7, 1997).

The Walt Disney Co. owns the ABC Television Network, several cable channels (ESPN, Disney, A&E, The History Channel, Lifetime), numerous radio stations, feature films (Disney, Touchstone, Hollywood, Miramax, Buena Vista, Caravan), and boasts sizable holdings in music, retail, publications and theme parks (*Broadcasting & Cable*, July 7, 1997).

News Corp. owns Fox Broadcasting Co., 23 U.S. television stations, several television production companies, a host of motion picture companies (including 20th Century Fox and Columbia TriStar), as well as publications and music labels (*Broadcasting & Cable*, July 7, 1997).

Lack of source diversity, and prescribed remedies

With these type of conglomerated media structures, newsstands still hold rows and rows of newspapers and magazines on a variety of subjects, cable and broadcast programming still churns out, as do movies and records. They are likely, however, to be variations of the same themes and messages (Golding & Murdock, 1996, p. 20). For instance, Top 40 radio, network prime-time programming, and genre television programs have always been criticized for lack of diversity, which is a significant phenomenon. Thus, while the wide array of media may imply a rich variety of entertainment and information, it in fact represents an increasingly narrow range of sources.

Since the "Golden Age" of television three broadcast networks controlled all of prime-time programming in American homes, and there were many complaints about the sameness among ABC, CBS and NBC. In 1970 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established a "prime-time access" rule which limited the amount of programming these networks could provide to their affiliates to just three hours between 7 - 11 p.m. (EST). The rule was "designed to release some prime television time from network control" so programming from independent producers and local stations could develop (Barron, 1973, pp. 188-189). To no avail, network affiliates often used off-network syndicated re-runs to fill the extra hour because there was still pressure to select programming that was less expensive and that would draw the largest audience possible.

As FCC Commissioner Reed Hundt recently admitted, the prime-time access rule "certainly didn't promote program diversity," but further government intervention would not work either (Hundt, 1996). A new (and reverse) strategy was adopted when the FCC repealed the prime-time access rule in 1995, and sought to promote vertical integration within media companies to increase horizontal competition among providers (Hundt, 1996). Media companies were already lobbying Congress for further de-regulation of their industry, and anticipating passage of the Telecommunications Act, the flurry of mega-media-mergers began to erupt in 1995 when Disney purchased Capital Cities/ABC (which merged several film studios with a major broadcast network, including 10 television stations, 21 radio stations, cable networks, and publications). Shortly thereafter CBS acquired Westinghouse, and News Corp. purchased New World Communications Group. This acquisition united another film power house to another broadcast network and the U.S.'s leading television station owner (Howard, 1998, p. 30; Chan-Olmsted, 1998, p. 40). The strategy, according to Hundt, was to allow the broadcast networks to team-up with movie studios and other sources of programming to compete with cable television (Hundt, 1996).

Ironically, at the same time the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was ushered in under the rubric of "protecting consumers against monopolies" (Clinton, 1996). President Clinton said at the signing ceremony that the new law "guarantees the diversity of voices our democracy depends upon" (Clinton, 1996). Vice President Gore, who had promoted the legislation, also added that "in the interest of promoting diversity of voices and viewpoints that are so important to our democracy, this legislation will prevent undue concentration in television and radio ownership" (Gore, 1996). However, the new law has done exactly the opposite of what it was said to do. Section 202(a) of the Act eliminates "any provisions limiting the number of AM or FM broadcast stations which may be controlled by any one entity." Section 202(c) erases any provision limiting the number of television stations that can be owned by a single source, and Section 202(f) wipes away restraints against a single entity controlling a network of broadcast stations and cable systems. The only limits placed on television ownership was a 35% cap of the total national audience. Prior to the 1996 Act television ownership was limited to just 12 stations and 25% of the national market. Radio ownership was limited to just 40 stations and 25% of the national market. Local ownership combinations of radio and television, television and newspaper, radio and newspaper, and television and cable were also prohibited before the Act. Now, however, all these restrictions were stripped away. Rhetoric before the passage of the Act about preventing undue concentration of media ownership appears to be a vacant promise.

Drushel (1998) found that since the passage of the Act horizontal concentration of the top 50 radio markets in the U.S. has nearly doubled as major conglomerates like Disney/ABC and CBS/Westinghouse have acquired individual stations and other ownership groups. The concentration of ownership has not resulted in increased listener choice, but rather, increased advertising rates for fewer sources "in control of a popular and pervasive mass medium" (Drushel, 1998, p. 19).

Howard (1998) has shown that the number of group-owned stations increased from 898 in 1995 to 1,006 in 1997, while the number of group owners decreased from 210 in 1995 to 184 in 1997 (pp. 25-26). Thus, the number of television stations per owner has increased substantially, and continues to do so. Currently, more than eight out of every 10 television stations in the top 100 U.S. markets are group owned (Howard, 1998, p. 31). The FCC is also considering whether or not to allow some local television station duopolies, as well as local cross-media ownership of newspapers and television stations in the near future (Howard, 1998, pp. 28-31). Some in Congress are even considering to remove any and all limits on broadcast ownership, and the National Association of Broadcasters are pushing them to make this happen quickly (Schwartzman, 1999, pp. 6 - 7).

Vertical integration of media

Through integration of different types of media, corporate conglomerations can produce a preponderance of the information and entertainment that circulate through the media. Through synergy, film studios, television networks, cable networks, music studios, record distributors, publishing companies, magazines and various commercial outlets under blanket ownership can help the market value for each other. For instance, company newspapers can give free publicity to their television stations, and television shows can give publicity to the movies that their film studios are producing. It may not exactly be "free" publicity, but the profits and expenditures seem to keep circulating via the same corporate ties, which suggests more than a little advantage. Disney, for example, is able to promote its films by selling soundtracks on their record labels, broadcast the films on their television network, print a book version, deliver rave magazine reviews and offer merchandising to boot (not to mention Saturday morning cartoons) (Pecora, 1998).

This process of corporate conglomerations owning the companies that produce the products that they also distribute is known as vertical integration. For example, media conglomerates may own movie studios, record labels, television shows, books and magazines, which represent the product line. Vertically integrated conglomerates may also own cable systems, retail stores, music clubs, book stores, theme parks, home video distributors and movie theaters, which represent the distribution line. That corporations own several different forms of media production and distribution outlets is a key element of conglomeration. Through this type of vertical integration, conglomerates can re-package fewer creative productions through more distribution outlets. Media conglomerates that own motion picture studios want "blockbuster hits that can be reproduced in a range of media forms. That is why the key holding for today's media conglomerates is a film studio" (*Video Age*, 1998, p. 14). Film studio's can provide television re-runs, home videos, book versions, sound tracks and a plethora of merchandising (T-shirts, posters, and action-figures), just to name a few.

Conglomerates with vast holdings also have greater financial power to either drive-out new entrants into the marketplace or buy them out. In 1996, just seven companies accounted for nearly all of U.S. music sales (*The Nation*, Sept. 1, 1997). Each of these seven companies (Time-Warner, Sony, Phillips Electronics, Seagram, Bertelsmann AG, EMI and The Indies) control several smaller labels. These conglomerates have the capacity to launch expensive promotional campaigns and offer big discounts to advertisers. Meanwhile, independent labels struggle each year not to be shut down by the major ones.

Growing dominance of the media conglomerates

Today's media conglomerates have far out-grown the newspaper chains of the late 19th and early 20th century. Now they are more akin to "global lords" as their command of information production and dissemination is world-wide (Bagdikian, 1989). For instance, "Rupert Murdoch, Ted Turner and very few others [are] in a position to transmit their Western images and commercial values directly into the brains of 75 percent of the world's population" (Mander, 1996, p. 13). Today's business community is a global one, and just as McDonalds and Pizza Hut exist in Russia, so too does CNN. The difference here is that information, not hamburgers, are the commodity, and that is troublesome. Via these patterns of ownership it appears that the structure of today's media system is evolving in a way where a handful of communication empires shape information and control public images over increasingly larger populations (Mander, 1996). As Bagdikian (1989) has suggested,

> Neither Caesar nor Hitler, Franklin Roosevelt nor any Pope, has commanded as much power to shape information on which so many people depend to make decisions about everything from whom to vote for to what to eat. (p. 809).

In light of these concerns, however, it seems possible that new communication technology may resist the pervading concentration of ownership.

One possibility of subverting the locus of control that the media elite now enjoy is the Internet, because of some of its unique dynamics. Due to the suffusion of telephone lines the Internet can connect individuals from all around the globe by providing a decentralized, undominated public sphere, where everyone could have access to receive *and disseminate* messages across the world. Considering the overbearing structure of media conglomeration though, can the veins of cyberspace effectively function as a conduit for information, ideas and culture without the preponderant influence the corporate elite? As Lenert (1998) has noted,

> the trend toward convergence has accelerated, and the historical divisions among the media categories of telephone, print, and broadcast are increasingly difficult to sustain. Most major newspapers now have electronic editions. Consumers can now access the Internet by using their television, and telephone calls can be made using the infrastructure normally associated with cable television. In light of technological pressures of convergence, it is often easier for the state to deregulate communications rather than attempt to sustain increasingly abstract distinctions among media (pp. 10-11).

McChesney (1997) has also warned that "the notion that the Internet will permit humanity to leapfrog over capitalism and corporate communication is in sharp contrast to the present rapid commercialization of the Internet" (p. 30).

Theoretical framework: Critical political economy

As the Internet may be seen as an alternative to the communications oligarchy, this study seeks to demonstrate how the Internet is being incorporated into that very same oligarchy. This is a well suited critical political economy critique, as it "takes its intellectual vigor from [Marxism]" and sees monopolistic and oligopolistic industries "as inimical to the social and economic benefits of the masses" (Rush & Blanco, 1998, p. 6). Gandy (1992) has noted that one of the challenges of traditional Marxist theory and political economy studies "is to describe the ways in which more and more activities are incorporated into the capitalist sphere of production" (p. 35). As a political economy critique, this study is concerned with "ownership, support mechanisms (e.g. advertising), and government policies [which] influence media behavior and content" (McChesney, 1998, p. 3). While many economists may see the marketplace as unquestionably benevolent and self-righting, critical political economists do not automatically make this assumption.

Perhaps, it is worth distinguishing critical political economy from two other economic perspectives -- liberal political economy and classical political economy -- as do Golding and Murdock (1996). Liberal political economists are attentive to the market exchange between consumers and competing commodities. They would assert that the greater play in market forces means greater "freedom" of consumer choice (Golding &

Murdock, 1996, p. 14). Therefore, liberal political economists believe that privatization of public services and communications is preferable because it increases consumer choice. Classical political economists would also assert that government intervention should be minimized so that market forces can have the widest "freedom" of operation (Golding & Murdock, 1996, p. 17). Critical political economists diverge from both of these perspectives by seeing beyond presupposed "freedoms," and focus on distortions and inequalities in the market system, which is often characterized by monopoly or oligarchy.

In political economy studies, Gomery (1993) argues that tracking corporate ownership is but one part of the analysis, as the connection needs to be made between media economics and normative concerns, such as "how best to promote diversity" (pp. 191 - 192). Gomery also discusses how different market structures (monopoly, oligopoly, and competition) influence corporate conduct. For instance, an oligopoly where just a few entities dominate the market often leads to sameness and lack of diversity among the key competitors. Gomery offers the example of network television where if

> NBC offers a new comedy at a particular time on a particular day, its rivals -- ABC, CBS, and Fox -- counterprogram. This leads to some experimentation, although all too often it means only a numbing generic sameness where like programs (e.g., comedies, dramas, or soap operas) face off against each other (1993, p. 194).

An oligopolistic structure also influences corporate conduct at large, as the recent trend in conglomeration indicates. Through synergy the major conglomerates (Time-Warner, Disney, Fox) are not solely reliant on the profits of a single operation, and unprofitable "subsidiaries can be reconstructed and repositioned with funds generated from other profitable ongoing businesses," and thus, this "enables an oligopoly to offer a high barrier to entry; potential rivals lack this conglomerate protection" (Gomery, 1993, p. 193). Even though the Internet has been touted as a decentralized and undominated public sphere, it is possible that the preeminent conglomerates in every other medium may be staking substantial claims on this developing territory. The danger presented here is that dominant media giants can use "their existing media to constantly promote their on-line ventures, and their relationships with major advertisers to bring them aboard Internet ventures" (McChesney, 1997, p. 31). Disney, for instance, would be able to use an Internet portal as another outlet to re-package their movies, books and cartoon characters. Moreover, search engines controlled by commercial media companies are more likely to direct users to more consumer oriented web sites, rather than information oriented sites that are not sponsored by advertisers. Also, because search engines receive the most traffic on the Internet, companies that control these sites can charge higher prices for on-screen ads, and can charge higher toll fees from users.

Procedures for analysis

With these propositions in mind, this essay will examine the following questions: What are the predominant commercial service providers and search engines on the World Wide Web? Who owns these commercial service providers and search engines? Are they connected vertically to other media conglomerates, or horizontally to other service providers/search engines? Have the commercial service providers or search engines been subject to the merger frenzy that has characterizes most media ownership? And, do these commercial service providers and search engines help popularize Internet versions of other mainstream media (for instance, re-package other creative content within a conglomerate)?

To answer these questions the author has sought out the business sections of major U.S. newspapers, and other popular news sources -- on-line and off -- (*The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, MSNBC, etc.) for information regarding mergers and acquisitions of on-line companies to other media conglomerates. These are the primary sources for news regarding corporate mergers and acquisitions, and are published daily, which makes them an excellent reference to study. Internet ratings services, such as Nielsen Media Research, NetRatings, Inc., and Media Metrix were also consulted for information regarding search engine and portal rankings.

Destination: Cyberspace

The primacy of corporate control reigns supreme in all media industries, and the Internet is turning out to be no exception as a few large commercial search engines, such as Yahoo, Netscape, Excite, Lycos and Infoseek, have already risen to popularity (NetRatings, 1999). Moreover, these popular search engines are relentlessly being sought out by the popular broadcast networks. Just recently, Fox (News Corp.) made a deal with Yahoo, CBS (Westinghouse) firmed-up an agreement with America On-line, NBC (General Electric) has stakes in CNET's Snap portal service, and ABC (Disney) has acquired a substantial portion of Infoseek (Pope, 1999), as well as the new Go network.

The major broadcast networks and other media conglomerates are also fighting it out for Lycos, and "odds are someone will make the company an offer it can't refuse in the near future" (Fry & Hanrahan, 1999). Lycos is currently entertaining offers from CBS (Westinghouse), ABC (Disney), Fox (News Corp.), Time-Warner, Bertelsmann AG, and Viacom, as well as other Internet companies, such as Microsoft, America On-line, Yahoo and Amazon.com (Fry & Hanrahan, 1999). An interesting point is that the top Internet service providers have also been part of the merger frenzy that has characterized other media ownership. For instance, in a bedazzling three-way deal Compu-Serve merged with America On-line and WorldCom in January, 1998. The deal allowed WorldCom to sell CompuServe's consumer subscriber base to America On-line. In addition, America On-line has a pending acquisition of Netscape Communications Corp. (Fry & Hanrahan, 1999).

The ever-changing world of mergers and acquisitions in cyberspace may be to fleeting for this essay, but the strategies behind the deal-making are not. Media giants, and broadcast networks in particular, have found the Internet to be another valuable tool in their synergy to attain larger audiences. As Pope (1999) explains,

> the Web until recently has been used primarily as a promotional vehicle. All of the major networks have extensive sites that they use to pitch their shows, with NBC even offering separate, online storylines for its drama "Homicide."

However, the deals are getting much sweeter, as Yahoo has agreed to spend $20 million in advertising on the Fox network, and in return Fox will insert Yahoo into the storylines of some its shows (Pope, 1999).

Disney is probably making the most sophisticated user of its Internet arm after purchasing a 43% stake (with an option to go up to 50% in three years) in Infoseek last summer (Stone, 1999, p. 61). With Infoseek, "Disney improves its ability to attract and keep Internet users and turn them into customers for a wide variety of products both on line and off" (Koch, 1998). Indeed, Disney now stems to the Internet as another outlet to re-package their movies, books and cartoon characters. Jake Winebaum, who heads up Disney's Internet ventures, said in a recent interview with *Time* magazine: "We know how to get a consumer online to make purchases" (Maloney, 1998, p. 34). Ironically, Winebaum adds to his comment that "the Internet is the ultimate medium about synergy" (Maloney, 1998, p. 34).

A negative implication for citizens who want to use commercial search engines for information seeking is that they will most likely be directed to consumer oriented web sites, rather than information oriented sites that are not sponsored by advertisers. As Jennifer Klein of Credit Service / First Boston told *USA Today*, there is growing "acceptance and success of on-line advertising, which is forecast to grow from $500 million in 1997 to an estimated $65 billion in 2001" (Koch, 1998). Also, because search engines receive the most amount of traffic on the Internet, companies that control these sites can charge higher prices for on-screen ads, and can charge higher toll fees from users.

Another ill from the lack of source diversity among search engines and service providers is that they help popularize Internet versions of other mainstream media. For instance, ABC, Disney and ESPN were among the most popular ten Internet sites in 1997. Although ABC, Disney and ESPN appear as three separate entities on the Top 10 list, they all stem from the corporate headquarters of Disney. Although the Internet is a relatively young medium, a few major players appear to already have dominant positions. "From month to month," one or two companies may trade places on the Top 10, "but the list is relatively stable for a medium as volatile as the web is supposed to be" (Dodge, 1998). Also, corporate firms that control U.S. journalism are also major players in "jockeying for the inside lane on the information highway" (McChesney, 1996, p. 5). The most popular news conglomerates in television, radio and newspapers are already the most prominent sources for news in cyberspace. For example, NBC has MSNBC, CNN has CNN on-line, *Sports Illustrated* (owned by the same as CNN) has a web site, ESPN (owned by Disney) has the SportsZone on-line, Fox Sports has a web site, as does *USA Today*, and the list goes on and on. It seems that corporations had begun to colonize cyberspace just as soon as it started to become popular (Shapiro, 1995).

Conclusion

The digitization of words, pictures, audio and video via such a pervasive medium as the Internet should empower every person to be a highly individualized producers and consumer of media. Every person from every continent should be able to circumvent mainstream television and magazines by being able to distribute media materials around the world themselves, and to receive an infinite amount of other information from a vast array of sources -- a real "marketplace of ideas," if you will.

> Thus, we ought to be witnessing at the end of the twentieth century a transformation of media industries into hundreds and hundreds of small companies. That, anyway, is what was predicted at the start of the computer revolution. We are supposed to be living at the end of "mass" society. This is the age of media individualism, infinite free choice, consumer sovereignty. Deregulation, espoused by politicians in country after country, should be guaranteeing this great opening of the information and entertainment market (Smith, 1991, p. 3).

Examples from recent history, however, are far from any prediction about consumer sovereignty and empowering citizenry. In the U.S., at least, privatization has meant commercialization, not democratization. Deregulation in the name of competition has meant conglomeration and oligopoly in practice. Therefore, the messages of advertisers and corporate hegemony proliferates at an ever increasing rate, and cyberspace will not likely diffuse them, but rather, echo them.

There is, of course, a more optimistic vision of things to come. Lenert (1998) posits that the "emerging technologies of the Internet and the World Wide Web are the legitimate successors to the great democratic traditions. It is yet to be decided how they will be regulated and with what social consequences," but we "must resist the assumption that 'liberalization equals democratization'" (p. 19). In this case, it will is important for those of us committed to a critical political economy of mass communication to closely track a "fierce lobbying battle" that has "erupted over whether the Federal Communications Commission will consider forcing cable-television companies to open their vast networks to rivals seeking to offer high-speed Internet service" (Fry & Hanrahan, 1999). Telephone and technology companies have been the among lobbyists, as they have a vested interest in the outcome. Their lobbying positions may be useful in predicting the future of integrating the Internet with television, and might help explain the furious land rush in cyberspace by the broadcast networks.

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Explore Your World: The Strange and Familiar Worlds of Discovery Channel's Nature Programming

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We cannot remember too often that when we observe nature,
and especially the ordering of nature, it is always ourselves
we are observing.
- G.C. Lichtenberg, Aphorisms (1765)

Explore your world.
- Discovery Channel promotional spot

Introduction

In 1995, the Discovery Channel celebrated its 10th anniversary as one of the most successful international cable television networks and cable brand franchises. During this same year, Discovery was named the Cable TV Marketer of the Year by Advertising Age for its innovative and integrated marketing efforts within an increasingly competitive cable television environment. Besides its expansive grouping of cable networks (Learning Channel, Animal Planet), the Discovery Channel's corporate acquisitions and marketing ventures include a nationwide chain of retail stores and future plans for a Discovery theme park and resort center (Fitzgerald 20).

As with many new cable television networks, Discovery's road to financial stability and marketing success was filled with numerous twists and turns. The initial idea for the network came in 1982, when an American University professor asked John Hendricks to help him distribute a documentary film about world religions to other colleges and universities. As he investigated, Hendricks, founder of the Discovery Channel, discovered the existence of an abundance of old yet interesting documentaries gathering dust. To take advantage of this documentary plentitude, he formed Discovery's parent, Cable Educational Network, and began to acquire the broadcast rights to a diverse assortment of documentaries produced by outfits such as the Public Broadcasting Service. From its early inception, Discovery's programming centered primarily on nature, science, and natural history documentaries. In 1991, Discovery acquired the fiscally-ailing Learning Channel in a strategic move to shore up its lock on the educational cable niche (Lewyn 68). Its focus remains centered on educational programs, the humanities, ancient history and theoretical science, and has grown from 14 million viewers in 1991 to 43 million viewers in 1995 (Fitzgerald 20). Discovery's other cable networks include the Travel Channel and Animal Planet. For subscribers with access to expanded digital services, Discovery's digital networks include the Home & Leisure Channel, Civilization Channel, Science Channel, Health Channel, Wings Channel, Discovery en Espanol, and Discovery Channel for Kids.

During a 1996 cable TV marketing conference, leading cable network executives reinforced the notion that, "effective branding means cultivating a network identity around a narrowly targeted concept with global appeal" (Littleton 56). Whether a cable network offers 24-hour news programming or classic Hollywood movies, the central goal of successful cable branding is to become recognized as a worldwide authority in a content field. Along with MTV and other cable networks, the Discovery Channel has sought to establish a global brand image, which is based on its perceived authority in educational and nonfictional documentary programming. "A brand is something that can be appreciated universally," said Greg Moyer, chief executive and creative officer of Discovery Communications. "We no longer think of ourselves solely as distributors, but that the heart and soul of our business is our brand" (Littleton 56). Hendricks asserts that one of the main reasons Discovery is such a success is because they were fortunate in claiming the "nonfictional cable niche first"(McElvogue 14). The market strength of Discovery's brand has allowed it to extend its cable and satellite networks into 40 countries and to expand its worldwide audience to over 80 million viewers (Wharton 20).

While the previous information describes many of the corporate and economic deteminants of Discovery's programming, it does not really explain how the network produces and schedules programming which effectively engages its diverse array of viewers. In fact, Discovery explicitly and tacitly develops a recognizable "identity" across the range of its programming. The network also creates programs that enable viewers to form certain cognitive and affective connections to them. Bruce Gronbeck maintains that television network programmers and producers "tap" into existing pools of cultural knowledge and discourses to create television programs that engage their particular audiences (232-43). In order to understand how the Discovery Channel taps into a wide range of available social discourses and reworks, structures, and shapes them into TV programs and program schedules which enable viewers to create a multiplicity of meanings from them, this study will analyze a single week of prime-time programming on the network. By analyzing the programs within the program schedule, this study will determine the specific thematic discourses that are represented in this week of prime-time (8:00-11:00pm, E.S.T.) programming on the network.[1]

In conducting this analysis, this study presumes that networks act as narrative agents in that they draw on a series of preexisting, socially produced discourses in the institutional process of producing and positioning programs within their program schedules (Kozloff 70). A counter-argument to the idea that networks are narrative agents is that the programs which comprise their schedules are often produced by production companies and independent producers who are not wholly affiliated with the network. But instead of engaging in the ongoing debates over who is the true author of TV programming (producer, director, actor-performer, production company), this study simply seeks to examine the discursive role of the network in producing, commissioning, and positioning TV programs within its program schedule. The network's main goals are vastly different from say the program producer or director, they not only need to attract viewers, but must sustain their interests across the range of its program schedule.

Another possible point of contention in this study concerns the choice of selecting a single week of prime-time programming over two or more weeks, or perhaps an entire year of programming on the Discovery Channel. While analyzing a month or a full year of programming would definitely produce a wealth of useful information, arguably a single week of programming illustrates the primary discursive strategies of a cable television network. Though choosing another week for analysis would have certainly produced some program differences, it should be acknowledged that Discovery's programming consists of regularly scheduled anthology series (Wild Discovery, New Detectives). Because the network's daytime programming is dissimilar to its prime-time programming, this study will limit its claims to the network's prime-time program schedule.

In order to determine the specific thematic discourses which underlie Discovery's prime-time programming, this study will reorder and restructure the programs into narrative subject areas (nature, science and technology) and then conduct an analysis of the central discourses represented in these programs. The final process of this study is reconstructing these discourses into identifiable discursive categories, which demonstrate a level of thematic unity. Michael McGuire argues that this process of reordering and reconstructing is the essence of structuralist criticism, "which seeks out thematic units and the relationships among them" (291). Because of space limitations, this paper will analyze the thematic discourses found within a week of Discovery's prime-time nature programming. With the immense popularity of series such as Wild Discovery, nature programs are the most visible and identifiable program genres on the network. The two main thematic discourses represented in Discovery's nature programs are: (1) Natural World as Familiar Domain; and (2) Natural World as Spectacle. The primary reason that these discourses are instrumental in understanding how the Discovery Channel engages its viewers and creates an identifiable cable identity is that they (discourses) are already a recognizable part of a viewer's social and imaginative worlds. These discourses do not just exist in Discovery's programming but are, in fact, represented in many other social and media forms. For instance, the discursive perspective of evaluating animals through human moral values (good, evil, lazy) is also represented in Hollywood films (The Lion King), circuses, children's books, songs, and other popular cultural forms. It should also be acknowledged that these thematic discourses have undeniable ideological and cultural implications for western societies.

Natural World as Familiar Domain

Margaret King, in her thematic analysis of Disney nature films, openly asserts that humans are continuously seeking out cultural patterns within the wider range of the animal kingdom and beyond to include plants and minerals, undersea life, and even the far reaches of outer space. The composite image of space aliens with their juvenilized, universal physical features (huge heads, large eyes, childlike size) are prime examples of the human impulse to seek out humanlike companions in the most unlikely of places. This same impulse leads people to perceive nature in human terms: how animals "enjoy" family life and reproduce; how younger animals "learn" a particular trade and learn to survive in a competitive wilderness. King claims that we set standards and values, and use the "human template of character" to evaluate "animal intelligence, beauty and virtue, diligence and playfulness, virtue and vice, suffering and reward, community and perdition, birth and death" (King 61).

One of the most consistent cultural patterns present in Discovery's nature programs and in nature programs in general is the cultural concept of gender. One of the central assumptions made within early feminist scholarship is that there is a distinct difference between sex and gender. The assumption maintains that while biological sex is natural and innate, gender is a cultural construct. Feminist scholarship maintains that biological sex differences cannot account for the range of social meanings attached to gender (masculinity and femininity) and to the distribution of power and social position between men and women. But despite the overwhelming weight of academic theories and scholarship behind this perspective, the majority of people still tend to conceive of gender differences as natural and innately given. They tend to maintain that, beyond sexual differences, there is an underlying essential gendered dichotomy between men and women. The assumption that gender differences are natural and "God-given" is so ingrained in our social consciousness and social institutions that to perceive otherwise, carries with it undeniable social and political implications (Coltrane 45).

The social tendency to essentialize gender differences is not just limited to men, or to the political right. There are some women writers who conceive of gender differences as being natural and timeless. For example, some cultural and eco-feminists, and neoconservative feminists conflate gender and sex to assert universal sex differences based on women's reproductive capabilities and their assumed closeness to nature. A comparable essentialist argument about men can be found in Robert Bly's popular Iron John. Bly theories that modern man has lost touch with his innate "Zeus energy" and therefore must participate in ancient "all-male" rituals to restore his natural self (Coltrane 45-6). The central flaw in mythopoetic and essentialist approaches to gender is that they use cultural and historically-determined myths and ancient practices to construct universal and biological truths, while ignoring the specific social contexts behind these myths and practices. The acceptance of the notion of a natural "masculine fierceness," along with an innate drive to validate assumed gender differences, carries with it the potential for violence directed at women and other men who challenge these assumptions.

Even scientists are not exempt from observing and perceiving the natural world through the culturally-constructed lens of gender. Londa Schiebinger asserts that women were shut out of western science in the eighteenth century not because of the rise of scientific academies or the formalization of scientific procedures, but rather because women were perceived as being ill-equipped for the intellectual pursuits of scientific research and better suited for childbearing. Schiebinger points out that Linnaeus did not have to classify plant life based solely on "sexual" differences - the physical presence of the stamen, pistil and other parts. Nor did he have to classify mammals based on the physical characteristic of lactating breasts, he could have chosen other defining characteristics. She theorizes that these choices were made based on the prevaling eighteenth century preoccupation with defining differences among the sexes of human, animals, and plant life. The scientists were implicitly searching for justifications in nature for social divisions of the sexes in their societies. They were motivated by the social and political need to exclude women from the fields and occupations of science in order that they will attend to their prescribed roles as mothers and will bear children to support the European nation-states' colonial, political, and economic expansion throughout the world (Rogers 8-9).

In a similar manner, contemporary natural scientists have been taken to task for carrying a number of gender-related assumptions into their research fields. Virginia Morell claims that many of the early male primatologists overlooked the role of the females in maintaining the social stability of the primate groups. Morrell relates that the groundbreaking studies of DeVore and Washburn led to a scientific view of the primate world as being filled with violence, political intrigue, and socially dominated by male primates fighting and competing for positions of power within the group. In contrast, the female "took on the look of primate June Cleavers: sexually passive, burdened with the care of their young, and valued primarily as sexual prizes for dominant males" (Morrell 428). However, in the past two decades, the field of primatology has seen the influx of women primarily drawn in part by the so-called "Trimates" - Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, and Birute Galdikas - protegees of Louis Leakey. Since the 1960s there has been a dramatic reappraisal of some of the assumptions made by earlier primatologists concerning the social organization of primates and the discovery of the significant bonds which exist between female primates and the structure of primate groups. A few primatologists maintain that the "pendulum has swung so far the other way" that the field is facing a new orthodoxy. Jim Moore, a primatologist at the University of California, San Diego, argues that many recent research studies have made the claim that "all primate societies are female-bonded, just as people use to claim that they were all male-bonded" (Morrell 428-29).

In acknowledging that sex and gender differences among men and women is still a critically contested social, cultural, and political issue in Western societies, it would seem "natural" to suggest that one of the most accessible and politically neutral domains by which to observe and contemplate these differences is the world of nature. It should be noted that while the social and behavioral characteristics of animals is dictated by their innate genetic instincts, human behavior is primarily structured by a complex array of cultural and social norms and contexts. Nevertheless, despite the specific physical and cognitive differences that exist between humans and animals, many people continue to seek out, unconsciously at least, gender patterns in nature. This apparent human impulse has not gone unnoticed by filmmakers and producers of so-called "nature films." In fact, both Disney's animated and documentary-style nature films feature a collection of animals with highly recognizable human gender-types from maternalistic and protective nature "mothers" (Bambi's doe-mother) to playful and rambunctious "boy" bear cubs. These patterns as well as others are also present in Discovery's nature programs. Beyond making animal subjects more accessible to viewers, these gender patterns tend to reinforce and "naturalize" many commonly held assumptions about the nature of men and women. In Discovery's nature programs, two predominant gender patterns are readily discernable to viewers - "Motherhood" and "Wild Males."

In the natural world, the majority of female animals are born with reproductive capacities along with a range of innate maternal instincts, which are triggered by the conception and birth of their offspring. While human females naturally have innate reproductive capacities, there is much debate over the naturalness of mothering and whether women are indeed born with certain so-called "maternal instincts." Adria Schwartz points out that the concept of motherhood and the subject of mothers stands at the apex of arguments between biological essentialist and social construction of gender camps. As advanced reproductive technologies have proliferated throughout modern culture, there has been an intense struggle to understand these changes in light of the culture's common thoughts about "mothers, mothering, and motherhood" (Schwartz 241). For example, in what ways does the biomedical practice of in vitro fertilization and the implantation of the fertilized ova into a "surrogate womb" for gestation problematize and possibly conflict with traditional notions of motherhood? (Schwartz 240-41).

Schwartz asserts that just as Judith Bulter deconstructs the supposedly unitary and universal category of women in Gender Trouble (1990), one could ask whether the term "mother" constitutes an unitary and a "stable signifier," which defines and controls all of those who become attached to it? Or is the term "mother" much like "woman" in that it tends to regulate and delimit existing gender relations, achieving stability and coherence only in its prescribed position within the domain of the traditional heterosexual family. Schwartz maintains that Butler's critique would suggest that the category of mother is a socially-constructed one based on the unstable category of gender. Butler argues that gender and sex do not necessarily maintain a fixed relationship with each other, primarily because the former is a social construct and the latter is biological. Therefore, the term 'masculine' may signify a female body and the term 'feminine' may just as easily signify a male body. Ultimately, Schwartz asserts that through Butler's critical perspective, one may conceive of a new definition of the term 'mother,' a term that is unconditional and unconstrained by the social dictates of gender (Schwartz 250-52).

Although Schwartz demonstrates how the concept of mother can be deconstructed, particularly in relations to gender, one of the most pressing questions is explaining what psychological orientations lead to the reproduction of mothering by females in western cultures? Nancy Chodorow suggests that the traditional gendered and sexed model of nurturing mothers and nonnurturing fathers has become an integral part of a continuous process of identification and internalization. While this process usually begins within the confines of the family, a central facet of this identification process is the continuous production and circulation of dominant images of motherhood in culture (Chodorow 248-50). For centuries, a myriad of maternal images have been circulated in the art world in paintings, sculptures, architecture, and literary works. Today, maternal images not only circulate in the fine arts but are also disseminated across a wide range of mass media. It should be acknowledged that not all of these images were traditional. In fact, many of these images were ideologically contradictory to the dominant image of motherhood.

However, in Discovery's nature programs, traditional images of motherhood are reproduced within the naturalizing domain of the animal kingdom. In the Wild Discovery episode, "Great Siberian Grizzly" (7/28/98) a mother grizzly leads her three bear cubs from their winter hibernation den on a long trek to a salmon-filled lake for the summer and then makes the perilous journey back to the den before the descent of winter. Invariably, the mother bear's maternalistic instincts are featured in a number of familiar scenarios from nursing her young cubs to fearlessly protecting her cubs from being attacked by adult male bears. On one particular occasion, the mother bear intimidates an adolescent male bear from advancing towards her three cubs. The bear is also represented as the ultimate in self-sacrificing mothers when she delays their agonizing, snow-swept journey back to the den for a day to care for one of her weakened cubs. The episode's voice-over narration highlights her sacrificial behavior: "mothers risk everything to give a fallen cub a chance." Maternal images also abound in other Wild Discovery episodes. In "Whitetail Country" (7/31/98) maternal images not only include a mother-doe nursing her newborn fawn, but the sight of a tender "mutual grooming" session between the doe and her young. In Sci-Tek's - The Science of Whales (8/1/98), the viewer learns that a newborn whale calf stays with her mother for a year or more. These episodes stress that in nature the female animals primary instinctual role is giving birth and caring for her young. As with the early primate studies, her social relations with other females and with the social group in general are usually de-emphasized in Discovery's nature programs.

Another prevalent gender pattern found in Discovery's nature programs may best be described as the representation of "Wild Males." Mature male animals are represented as physically and sexually aggressive, combative and competitive with other males, and disassociated from and often hostile to the offspring of their own species. The social image of human males as "naturally" physically and sexually aggressive and inherently disassociated from any nurturing role is often used as ammunition by those assuming the biologically essentialist position towards sex and gender. While Bly and other followers of the mens' movement rely on figures from ancient Greek, Roman, and Native American mythologies to construct their masculine ideals, these social ideals generally rest on the timeless categorization of "Man-the-Hunter" and spiritual wanderer-seeker of new knowledge (Coltrane 45-6). One of the central problems with these gendered conceptions is that women in these ancient and past cultures were relegated to domestic and nurturing roles in society.

In the Wild Discovery episode, "Whitetail Country" the voice-over narration explains that a strict social structure undergrids a herd of whitetail deer. This rigid power structure dictates that subordinate bucks must avoid eye contact with dominant bucks. These dominant bucks use their superior size to intimidate any rivals and to maintain their dominant positions. On a rare occasion, a buck intent on defending his doe must participate in a one-on-one antiller fight with a rival buck. While the loser of the fight must leave the area, the "victor buck" is said to strengthen the genetic lineage of the deer population. In The Science of Whales, the narration points out that a similar power structure exists with whales in which one male challenges another established male for mating rights with the female. As with the bucks, the male whales fight one-on-one against each other with a series of brutal headbutts until the other dies or leaves the area. And, as with the bucks, the consequence of this violent encounter is that the male is "rewarded" with the mating rights with the females. While these episodes accurately present a central facet of the existing social and power structures within these species, their continued stress on the more aggressive and power-related practices of the males tends to perpetuate the social perception that all male animals (including humans) are predominantly "Wild Males" at heart.

King, in her analysis of Disney's True-Life nature films, asserts that one of the central themes of these films is the anthropomorphizing of the entire spectrum of nature including animal and plant life. The broad template of human social organization, with its inscribed concerns, morals and values, are imposed onto the natural world. Disney extends its anthromorphic slant by creating animal "stars" and providing them with names, often human names: Flash, the Teenage Otter (1965) and Perri (1957) a film biography of a squirrel. On one level, the viewer is asked to assume that these names are comparable to other facets of nature. One primary anthropomorphic technique is to narratively construct the film's central animals as emphatic "characters" with clearly discernable personalities. For example, in Disney's The Incredible Journey (1963), the live-action film story of three pets making their long way back home could have just as easily featured three human characters, with their own idiosyncrasies, personal goals, and distinctive character traits. But for the viewer, cats and dogs give the story an added dimension - "the nature dimension" (King 64-65).

This anthropomorphic penchant for constructing animals into characters is also present in Discovery's nature programs. For example, the Wild Discovery episode, "Great Siberian Grizzly" is primarily structured by two simultaneous storylines. The main story concerns a mother grizzly bear and her three cubs, and their long springtime trek to a salmon-filled lake and their perilous snowy journey back to the winter den. The secondary story concerns an adolescent bear's crucial life struggle to master the art of catching salmon in order to put on enough body weight to survive the long winter hibernation. Both of these storylines follow a familiar chronological narrative as it traces the animals progression from springtime back to the winter den. Through the continual incorporation of intimate close-up shots accompanied by a voice-over narration which details the animal's specific behavior and motivations, these animals are effectively transformed into dramatic characters for the viewing audience. While this episode does describe the activities of other wildlife in Kamchatka, it primarily presents dual narratives featuring the mother grizzly and her cubs, and the vital life lessons of a single adolescent bear. Though the Discovery Channel stops short of personally naming its animals and does portray them in a less sentimental manner than Disney, nevertheless many of its nature programs focus on the character-like storylines of one or more animals.

Another anthropomorphic technique is to use familiar human terms to describe acts of nature. In the Wild Discovery episode, "Baboons" (7/26/98) the voice-over narration characterizes baboons in such morally judgmental terms as "criminals," "beggars," and "victims." The program's narrative involves the social, economic, and environmental problems associated with the baboon population, within a Kenyan national park, and its close proximity to the Kenyan people. A central facet of the episode's narrative concerns the baboons destructive and economic damage to local farm crops, which borders the park. In this segment, the visual rhetoric and narration constructs the moral image of these baboons as "raiders" committing a "crime" by "stealing" corn in the fields. This sense of transgressing against humans is further reinforced by a dramatic sequence in which baboons invade a village home and damage private property in their search for food. In other narrative segments in this episode, a troop of baboons "beg on the streets" for food and "exploit" the interests of roadside tourists who stop alongside a Kenyan highway, while another segment presents the repulsive image of baboons fighting among themselves and scavengering for food in the smoldering remains of a Kenyan hotel's burning trash dump. In socially constructing these baboons as human-like criminals, vagrants, and beggars it would seem reasonable and perhaps morally justifiable to punish and reform them into good citizen baboons. But, in a contradictory manner, these same baboons are also represented as "victims." As an annual effort to protect their villagers' farm crops, the Kenyan government either traps or shoots "problem baboons" who periodically escape from the national park. The victimization of these baboons is emotionally dramatized through a tight close-up shot of a caged baboon with an extremely pained, fearful expression on his face. The narration also informs the viewer that many of these baboons end up as subjects in medical research labs and postulates whether the benefits to humankind can ever compensate for their suffering. This episode illustrates the particular and often confusing dilemma of perceiving nature and its animals in predominantly human and morally normative terms.

This tendency of anthropomorphizing animals includes the way in which individual animals are constructed and perceived by viewers. The majority of animals in nature programs tend to fall within the confines of what can be called the cuteness/repulsiveness dichotomy. On the one hand, certain animals (lions, bears, whales) are valued for their aesthetic beauty and form. Traditionally, humans are attracted to animals that have the evolutionary juvenilization of biological features. These features include large eyes, protruding cranium, and retreating demonstrative baby releasers in its juvenile appearance. On the other hand, animals with an adult alien appearance, lack of baby releasers in its juvenile appearance, and employ senses outside of human abilities are associated with negative values (Papson 73). These negative values may be translated into emotional reactions like disgust and repulsion. Kellert asserts that the list of species disliked by Americans include "the cockroach, mosquito, rat, wasp, rattlesnake, bat, vulture, and shark" (21).

This type of dichotomy is represented in many of Disovery's nature programs. When a young bear cub dies in "Great Siberian Grizzly," his death is not only a family tragedy but, in fact, represents a preordained form of spiritual death. The voice-over narration poetically explains that when the young cub dies his "soul will return to the Kamchatka mountains." In effect, this small bear cub is granted the same level of spirituality normally reserved for humans and their deities. But while bear cubs are valued to the extent of being endowed with spiritual souls, other animals are so reviled and physically repulsive that we tend to associate them with moral "evil." In Discovery's Movie Magic episode, "Snakes, Snakes and More Snakes" (7/28/98) several experts attempt to understand why most people are scared of snakes. One expert theorizes that people unconsciously fear snakes because of their disturbing tube-shaped design and their innate ability to swallow their victims whole. He elaborates that snakes are like "traveling esophaguses." Despite the program's best efforts to demystify the rationale behind people's dread of snakes, it still continues to emphasize the same negative attributes which are socially attached to the animals. For instance, the narration not only informs the viewer that the African black mambo has an inherent nasty disposition that leads it to attack without provocation, but that it is "the most dangerous snake in the world." David Bell, a herpetologist, who served as a consultant on the film Venom (1982), temporarily departs from his scientific descriptions of the mambo's behavior to question why God ever put such a deadly creature on the earth.

One of the most prevalent themes in nature programs is a persistent stress on nature's intrinsic hierarchal structure. In Discovery's nature programs, this structure is often referred to as the "Great Chain of Being." In this chain, the natural world is perceived as a sort of grand circular food chain, in which every species both dominates and is dominated by another. At the top of this hierarchal structure are humans followed by the other warm-blooded mammals. Foucault reminds us that the Enlightenment perception of nature as an ordered and functional hierarchy is actually a discursive formation created by humans seeking to impose their sense of order onto the natural world. He further points out that our very understandings and realizations of the natural world are invariably circumscribed and limited by the structure of our own language systems (Foucault 153). Because all language is metaphoric to "outside of skin" reality, perceiving nature as a great chain of being is no less valid than observing it as a Newtonian mechanism or a living social organism. Also because humans have a historical and cultural tendency of imposing their own social organization onto the natural world, it should come as no surprise that nature is seen as a familiar social world. In many ways, nature's perceived hierarchal structure mirrors the socio-economic stratification undergriding late-twentieth-century modern capitalism. And just as the social structure of the whitetail deer is represented as a patriarchal order in which dominant males compete for social and genetic dominance within a single herd, a similar power struggle exists among humans within an increasingly social darwinistic global capitalist system. While the spoils for the dominant bucks includes a "harem" of does and the continuation of their genetic heritage, the perceived common-sense rewards for dominant humans includes social, economic, and sexual success.

Another familiar discourse often associated with modern capitalism is that of gambling. Capitalism is frequently perceived as a complex, risky game of identifiable winners and losers, in which a majority of new business ventures fail every year. A similar gambling discourse is used to explain why some species survive over others. In Discovery's The Extinction Files (7/27/98), despite the program's determined scientific discourse, the narration frequently employs the discourse of gambling to remind viewers that species evolution and extinction are primarily driven by chance and luck. For instance, during the late Cretaceous period, the demise of the dinosaurs and the mass extinction of seventy-six percent of the species on earth provides a forum for the mammals to emerge as "winners" and assume "center-stage" in the evolutionary game. It should be noted that evolutionary changes are never absolutes and, in fact, involve a certain level of indeterminacy. But the program's continued reliance on a gambling discourse portrays the evolutionary process as a type of natural lottery in which there are clear winners and losers.

The nature program's discursive themes concerning evolving winners and losers of its hierarchal structure leads to its stress on the darwinian aspects of species adaptability and the survival of the fittest. In "Great Siberian Grizzly," for example, a bear cub's apparent "passive" nature implicitly leads to the cub's eventual demise. And as an adolescent bear struggles to catch swimming salmon during Kamchatka's evanescent summer, the program's narrator informs the viewer that the bear's very survival depends on his mastery of this task.

In many ways, Discovery's nature programs interconnects to the general cultural enthusiasm for biological and genetic explanations for human behavior. Paula Fass asserts that despite the fact that most social scientists acknowledge that social and cultural processes have had a dramatic impact on the development of the human brain and the expression of its thought processes and thereby forever altering genetic determinism, contemporary media is filled with stories about the discovery of a new gene and the further advancement of understanding and controlling human life and behavior. This progressive march towards the genetic domination and control of human life is best exemplified by the continued work of the human genome project. She proclaims that it is ironic that the main promise offered by the project is increased human control over the same genetic domain that was once publicly and academically scorned for its biological determinism (Fass 238-39; Cole 456-57).

According to King, one of the central issues posed in the nature film is defining the proper relationship between humans and nature. What other types of relationships are possible other than the older "exploiter/exploited model"? (King 61). These relationships involve a number of relevant issues including hunting and preservation, conservation and animal husbandry, and protecting select animal and plant species (King 61). But before one can address these issues one must first define nature.

Macnaghten and Urry suggest that most people take for granted that strictly speaking there is no such thing as one single identifiable "nature," there are only natures. These different versions of nature establish the boundaries for ongoing debates over the social meaning of nature and humankind's proper relationship to it. Szerszynski outlined two distinct ways in which nature has been conceived. The first, is the conception of nature as a threatened realm. This conception can be seen in the public concern over endangered species, the idea of nature as an exhaustible resource worthy of conservation, and the perception of nature as a pure and healthy body being constantly threatened by human-made pollution (Macnaghten 22).

This social conception of nature as a threatened realm is represented in many of Discovery's nature programs. In this conception, humans are implicitly represented as having ultimate power and control over nature. Unchecked, this control often becomes a destructive force against nature. In the episode, "Baboons" the narrator exemplifies the extend of this control when he solemnly asserts that "humans have altered the world beyond all recognition." In the Wild Discovery episode,"The Island of the Apes" (7/29/98) the African villagers seasonal damming of a river to dig for diamonds has disastrous environmental consequences for the indigenous fish and the spot neck otter. Later, in the episode, the viewer also learns that "monkey hunting" is not only a big business in neighboring Serra Leone, but that the hunters are threatening the very survival of the primate population on the tiny island of Teeya.

Szerszynski's second conception of nature is as a sacred realm filled with great moral and spiritual power, a place to be enjoyed and worshiped by humans. As with the first, this conception may come in many guises: nature as a place of beauty and sublimity, nature as an aesthetic and spectacular object, nature as a place for relaxation and recreation, nature as an inexhaustible resource for moral, physical, and spiritual healing, and nature as a peaceful sanctity from the moral and spiritual ravages of modern and industrialized social life (Macnaghten 22-3).

In Discovery's nature programs, nature is sometimes represented as a great eternal entity. In "Siberian Grizzly," the episode's picturesque visual rhetoric and narration work together to present the animals of Kamchatka as being a part of the perpetual great chain of being including every creature from "bear-to-eagle." The death of an animal is seen as just a part of this great cycle: "salmon are the lords - they die so others can live." At the end of this episode, the narrator calls on humans to learn from this great cycle in Kamchatka, a near eternal place where one encounters "innocent animals" which have existed since the Ice Age. He states that the "great bears can teach us so much we have forgotten." This episode conceives nature as an all-knowing, God-like teacher with the inexhaustible capacity to restore and renew humankind's place within the universe. In this conception, humans are humbled into being just one of nature's creatures. The central danger in perceiving nature as an eternal entity is that one easily overlooks the impact humans continue to have on the natural world (McKibben 1-8).

A third set of representations of nature constructs it as an open-air laboratory or a field for scientific inquiry. While this conception of nature may readily acknowledge many of the same assumptions of the "nature as threatened" representations, it primarily maintains that nature is a realm that can be managed and controlled through modern science and conservation. Lowe points out that in the early part of the twentieth-century there were early tensions between preservationists who desired to leave nature in its original wild state, and ecologists who were apt to regard nature and nature reserves as sites for scientific inquiry. By the end of the second world war, there emerged a consensus among the western scientific community that wildlife and conservation issues came to be incorporated within the new rational, planned order (Macnaghten 38-40).

This conception of nature is represented in Discovery's nature programs. Because one of the main components of modern science is empirical observation, surveillance becomes one of the primary tasks of the scientist studying the natural world. Surveillance is necessary not only for the rudimentary function of counting, categorizing, and describing all forms of animal and plant life, but to use this information to make conservationist decisions about whether to alter nature's natural habitat or its biological conditions. For instance, in Discovery's Jaws in the Mediterranean (7/29/98) natural scientists rely on numerous methods to survey the "shark ecology" of the great white shark in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. These methods include measuring the size of small sharks at a local village fishmonger's market to studying the great white's available food supply of seals and dolphins. Later, in the episode, the scientists continue their surveillance efforts by tagging blue sharks in order to track their growth and migration patterns. In some cases, scientists actively intrude into the behavioral and biological functions of animal life. In the Discovery News (7/31/98) news story, "Honey Bees Under Attack," scientists help Floridian farmers by "teaching" American honey bees to eat the eggs of the South African black beetle which threatens the production of their beehives.

Natural World as Spectacle

If the Discovery Channel's nature programming frequently constructs a domain that is reassuringly "familiar" to viewers, it also presents a world that is undeniably "strange." It is a world that frequently exists in the most geographically extreme terrains (from civilization) and is often perceived as an inhospitable environment for human life. In other words, these distant, exotic geographic locations are counterpoised to the comforting domestic spheres, which comprise the urban and suburban worlds of its viewers. For instance, "Siberian Grizzly" begins with a series of shots of a snow-ladden, mountainous, barren terrain, with the voice-over narrator informing the viewer that the Russian Peninsula of Kamchatka "is one of the world's best-kept natural history secrets. . . remote and isolated." The exoticness and spectacle of this locale is further emphasized by its visual imagery, heavily dramatic music, and narration which informs the viewer that Kamchatka is a land containing thirty-three active volcanos, huge glaciers, and is riddled with smoke-filled thermo beds. The narration highlights the terrain's mysteriousness and timelessness by calling it a place of "primordial heat." Although a vastly different type of landscape, the tropical island of Teeya in the episode "The Island of the Apes" is just as foreign and strange to Western viewers. This island sits in the middle of the Moa River in the country of Serra Leone in West Africa. The island is further differentiated as the only island with a dense rainforest and the only one (rainforest) left from the Upper Guinea Forest. The island's uniqueness is further identified as having one of the largest concentrated primate populations in the world. From the program's outset, the narration implicitly reminds the viewer that they are receiving a rare glimpse into an unfamiliar and exciting natural area. In fact, the Menda, a nearby West African tribe, are said to protect the island from foreigners and hunters and worship the island as a "sacred place."

However it should be noted that not all Discovery nature programs feature exotic, foreign, and faraway locations to explore diverse animal life. The episode, "Whitetail Country," for example, is located in the woodlands of North America and documents the attributes and behavioral characteristics of the whitetail deer. But despite the more familiar aspects of the huge deer population in certain regions in North America, most people have little direct experience with deers. For the vast majority of people, their primary experiences with indigenous wildlife (deers, bears) is chiefly defined by humanly-created animal zoos, circuses, and theme parks. Therefore, this episode still offers viewers an unusual up-close yet mediated experience of whitetail deers in their natural habitat.

Because the animals featured in nature programs are marginal to the lives of most of us, one of the most pressing questions is why viewers are attracted to images of animals who have no relationship to their everyday lives? Aside from their perceived marginality, sharks, bears, snakes, and other animals evidently have television audiences. Stephen Papson suggests that one way to address this question is to focus on the cultural relevance of the information. For instance, knowledge about a particular animal has cultural relevance when it becomes essential for everyday life. For South Pacific islanders, knowledge about sharks and their natural habitat is crucial for their daily existence. When the animal is part of the physical environment, it becomes assimilated into the cultural system which maintains its adaptability with the natural environment

(Papson 77-8). Papson points out that, in western societies, animals have been physically and cultural marginalized from modern life. Ultimately, the processes of modernization, industrialization, and urbanization continue to divide the relationship between animal and humans and this has led to a more fragmented, aesthetized form of relations.

Papson argues that if cultural salience is lacking in relation to the natural world, a new salience develops based on aesthetization and spectacularization (78). This process of aesthetization reflects the separation of the object or subject from the experience of everyday life. Macnaghten and Urry point out that in England, by the end of the eighteenth century, a select few areas like the English Lake District were tamed for aesthetic consumption and that nature was turned into a visual spectacle. While the Lake District was one of the first natural sites to be turned into "beautiful," it had been regarded as a rugged and untamed region just a few decades earlier. They point out that even Daniel Defoe viewed the English Lake District as one of the "wildest, most barren and fruitful" places he had ever visited. In fact, up until the latter part of the eighteenth century nature was conceived as a wild and hostile domain. Macnaghten and Urry relate that nature was frequently perceived as an inhospitable place filled with "impenetrable forests, fearsome wild animals, unscalable mountains and ravines, hostile demons and appalling odors issuing from the bowels of the earth, especially through the orifices of swamps and marshes" (Macnaghten 114).

Central to the spectacularization of nature were the development of various visual discourses, including the sublime, which enabled the most frightening aspects of nature to be reconceived and reformulated into a subjective aesthetic experience. Macnaghten and Urry relate that these discourses were derived from the aesthetic concepts of Kant and Burke. Burke theorizes that the sublime is a complex experience, involving simultaneous feelings of terror and pleasure. He maintains that in order for an individual to overcome the terrifying aspects of the sublime, she must redirect this intense energy to symbolically remove herself from the threatening object. The sublime involves a strong affective response to rugged and untamed landscapes, rapidly flowing rivers, crashing seawaves, and jagged rock ledges and overhangs that were perceived threatening to humans. The discourse of the sublime includes the widespread use of descriptive terms like "desolate, wild, primaeval, hideous, frightful, and astonishing" (Macnaghten 114).

At the outset of the nineteenth century there was a gradual proliferation of discourses which came to view nature as a visual spectacle. These discourse came to perceive nature as a site filled with beautiful scenery, expansive landscapes, and a host of insatiable perceptual pleasures. Macnaghten and Urry claim that these discourses were influenced by the popular musings of the Romantic writers who constructed nature as a place of leisurely pursuits, touristic pleasures, and as a solace from the coarse environment of the industrial cities. These discourses also functioned as legitimators for socially constructing diverse parts of nature into entertaining spectacles from dramatic landscapes to picturesque meadows to turbulent seascapes. These same visual discourses also legitimated the transformation of nature's most terrifying animals (lions, elephants) into visual spectacles and aesthetically pleasing objects of nature. This aesthetization and spectacularization process was extended with the advent of photography. Photography, as a new communication medium, helped to construct a new aesthetic discourse as to what aspects of nature were worth "sightseeing" (scenic vistas, exotic animals), along with excluding many elements from this discursive process. Macnaghten and Urry further argue that photography's affect on nature is best illustrated in the ways in which "the snapshot transforms the resistant aspect of nature into something familiar and intimate, something we can hold in our hands and memories. In this way, the camera allows us some control over the visual environments of our culture" (116).

In Discovery's nature programs, the visual rhetoric and narration work together to re-present a natural landscape, occurrence (volcano, earthquake) or an animal (lion, scorpion) as a spectacular yet intimate aesthetic object available to be scrutinized by the viewer. As a perceptual object, the animal or natural phenomena can be valued primarily for its more visually-oriented physical and material qualities. Spectacularization is achieved primarily because these animal characteristics are presented as distinctly nonhuman and "otherly." These programs by focusing on an animal's physical and instinctual characteristics often neglect to explore other aspects including its cognitive functions and its larger position within the world's changing eco-system.

The most prominent physical characteristics featured in Discovery's nature programs are an animal's adaptability to its environment and its predatory abilities. In terms of adaptation, an animal's adaptability is liken to an art object, in which form follows function. In the episode, "Baboons," for example, the narrator marvels at the resourcefulness and adaptability of baboons to survive in a number of distinct environments. He points out that in a Kenyan nature reserve filled with plentiful rivers and creeks baboons have learned to swim underwater in order to crossover to the other side. The episode stresses that the baboons remarkable adaptability even extends to their survival within man-made environments including motor roadways and the grounds of a tourist hotel.

In the episode, "The Red Desert" a large number of species are highlighted for their unique naturally adaptable designs. These species include "solar-powered" lizards which are innately designed for the harsh desert climate primarily because they are encased in waterproofed scales. Because the lizard's scales need to be heated by the sun, its physical design is well-suited for high-speed predatory activities. During the daytime the salty basin of Yurallan is an inferno with tempartures soaring to 140 degrees fahrenheit yet even here some animals manage to do well but only after sunset. A unique insect called the tiger beetle spends its entire lifespan on the salt basin. The beetle's long-limbs enable it to achieve quick speeds to capture and live off of insects blown in from the savannah.

Furthermore, in the episode, "Whitetail Country" a whitetail newborn fawn is uniquely designed to hide itself from its potential predators (wolves, coyotes). The fawn's coat is naturally camophlaged to easily blend into the natural environment. As with the desert hedgehog, the fawn's sensitive sense of hearing enables it to detect a nearby predator. Upon detecting a close intruder, the fawn instinctually lies still and motionless in tall grass and gives off very little body scent. The episode represents the whitetail deer as an aesthetic animal-object naturally designed for its North American habitat. Because the deer's innate instincts and features are completely distinct from human traits, these characteristic differences serve as spectacular attractions for television viewers.

The second prominent physical characteristic represented in many of Discovery's nature programs is an animal's inherent predatory and hunting abilities. In fact, the predatory nature of animals is highlighted in the opening sequence of the popular Wild Discovery series. This sequence consists of a fast-paced montage of animals (lions, crocodiles) charging directly at the camera. This sequence, which frames the series, both illustrates and reminds the viewer that the program features wild, untamed animals. The term "wild" signifies the opposite meaning of tame, domestic, and civilized, which are traits normally associated with the suburbanized and urbanized worlds of the network's viewers.

This predatory characteristic is further emphasized within the narratives of the nature programs. In "Red Desert" the sand boa constrictor, though only 8 inches long, has eyes on the top of its head and is perfectly designed to glide beneath the sand in order to ambush its prey. The boa then proceeds to squeeze the life out of its prey. The episode also features the tiny pieballed shrew, described by the narrator as a lethal "gray and white assassin." Despite its miniature size, the shrew does not hesitate to attack a locust twice its own size. After dispatching its prey, the tiny shrew is able to get enough moisture from the bodily fluids of its victims to survive for days without water. In "Siberian Grizzly," the narrator dramatically and painstakingly outlines the natural predatory features of the Siberian Grizzly bear: ". . . ripping teeth, 5-inch claws - they are killers." The episode demonstrates the predatory traits of the grizzly through segments showing the bears hunting and killing lake salmon and caribou.

Another means by which an animal's predatory abilities are highlighted and turned into a visual spectacle is to socially construct the animal as an explicit threat and danger to humans. Despite the fact that shark attacks are rare and that the likelihood of an attack is less than being struck by lightning, Discovery's Jaws of the Mediterranean continually relies on the threat of a shark attack to engage its viewers. The program begins its documentary-style narrative by featuring a dramatic re-enactment of a 1956 shark attack near Malta on the Mediterranean Sea in which a man is fatally attacked by a great white shark. Besides intense dramatic music, the program relies on a number of fictional techniques to heighten the dramatic fear of a shark attack. For example, to highlight the shark's imminent threat to swimmers in the Mediterranean the program employs the same shark's-eye point-of-view shot of the swimmers as the popular 1975 feature film Jaws. This fictional film technique along with the program's title "Jaws" not only furnishes an accessible intertextual reference for viewers but also provides another framework (fictional) by which to view and interpret the program. In another shark attack incident, an Italian fire chief claims that the only "signs" left of a diver's fatal encounter with a great white are the indentations left on the diver's steel air tanks. The diver's body was never found. The program also presents the great white as an historically-situated creature whose officially recorded attacks on humans in the Mediterranean date back at least to the turn of the century. In 1909, a newspaper story reports that forty people were attacked by sharks, with eighteen fatalities. On the one hand, the program presents the great white shark as a threat to humans and other sea life (dolphins). On the other hand, it also presents the great white as a "victim" of Italian pollution in the Adriatic Sea in which the loss of its food supply (tuna, dolphins) threatens its own survival.

In a similar manner, while the Movie Magic's episode "Snakes, Snakes and More Snakes" illustrates how Hollywood has exploited "our fears" of snakes in feature films, at the same time, the narrative continues to rely on the threat of snakes to engage its viewers. And though the episode details how Hollywood employs the latest in computer animation and animatronic technologies to create realistic snakes that are scarier and more menacing than nature, nonetheless it continues to refer to snakes as "nature's most hated creatures" and the "least human of all creatures." Throughout the episode's narrative descriptions of Hollywood's creation of deadly filmic snakes are interspersed anecdotal stories of actual near death experiences with snakes. One story describes the perilous scenario of an animal trainer who's heart stopped after his body was squeezed by a giant python. The trainer, though pronounced clinically dead, was revived by paramedics when they restarted his heart and saved his life. Snakes are also perceived as aesthetic objects that in some ways are superior to humans. A professional snake wrangler comments that the black mambo "survives much better than we can - they are perfect."

In a few cases, Discovery's nature programs construct animals that may or may not still exist as potential threats and dangers to humans. In the Into the Unknown episode, "God Bear of Kamchatka" (7/30/98) scientific statements by natural scientists and computer animation are used to depict the immense physical dimensions of the great Ice Age bear: "three times the size of the American bear; stands nine feet tall at shoulder; and weighs two-and-a-half thousand pounds."

The only proof of the possible existence of the ancient bear are a few scattered personal accounts and folk stories of people living in the Russian Providence of Kamchatka. Despite the preponderance of scientific evidence that the bear is extinct, the episode's narrative repeatedly highlights the bear's physical superiority over humans. For instance, Dr. Chris Cooper, a kinesiologist, asserts that humans "could not of survived these large predators" and that "humans could not escape the bear - the bear was faster than the horse." This point is further illustrated with footage showing that even a well-trained athlete pushed to his limits cannot achieve enough speed to escape the charging bear. A computer animation segment depicts the God Bear attacking a tribe of early cavemen. The narrator points out that the caveman's stone tools and weapons were simply no match for the huge ancient bear. While the episode's narrative highlights the ongoing debate over whether the God Bear still exists, nonetheless one of its primary attractions is the spectacle of the great bear as a perceived threat to humans..

Another thematic discourse represented in the "God Bear" program (as well as others) is the timeless theme of humans struggling against the forces of nature. These forces may include wild animals (bears, lions) and natural phenomena (earthquakes, hurricanes). Although modern technoscience has given humans an almost indomitable control over the forces of nature, Discovery's science and nature programs focus much of their narrative concerns on the enduring human struggles with the natural world. In World of Wonder (7/31/98), for example, a news story depicts humankind's eternal and mythic struggle with the "most lethal of all natural disasters - floods." The story begins by reminding viewers that the "great flood" was a pivotal force of nature in the Bible. Though the story details the efforts of scientists and engineers to predict flood patterns, its narrative primarily consists of indelible images of nature's destructiveness. These images include a father and son swept away by the flood waters of a Texas river, a pickup truck literally washed off a road, and an entire town devastated by massive river flooding. The scientists' work is given mythic proportions when the narrator dramatically informs the viewer that they (scientists) are engaged in a "historic epic battle with nature."

Conclusions

What are the ideological and social implications of Discovery's nature programs' perceptions of the natural world as both familiar and strange domains? While these programs do provide factual information about animals, they also rely on the "human template of character" to perceive animals in moral and normative terms, and to engage their viewers on a dramatic and emotional level. These programs also tap into the viewer's knowledge of human social organization to impose this hierarchal social order to the "animal kingdom." The animal world is represented as a highly dramatic realm filled with close-knit families, external conflicts, and intense competitions - in other words, a world not unlike the one inhabited by Discovery's middle-class, suburban viewers. For the most part, these social representations of the animal world tend to reinforce the dominant social and cultural conceptions of social class and gender in the human world. If animals are valued for their human-like qualities, they are also valued for their non-human and strange attributes. Because these animals are generally removed from the daily lives of the viewers, they can be more easily appropriated as aesthetic, and exotic object-subjects, to be primarily appreciated for their physical and instinctual qualities (hunting, reproducing). The main problem with perceiving of animals in anthropomorphic or spectacular terms is that it becomes increasingly difficult for people not to impose their moral and social assumptions onto the natural world. In effect, public policy decisions concerning animal and plant life, and the natural environment become inescapably mired in the moral and social universe of human communities.

Nature, or the natural world is frequently conceived in both diverse and contradictory conceptions in Discovery's nature programs. These conceptions include nature as an eternal moral and spiritual balm for modern life; nature as a victim to industrialization, pollution, and human manipulation; and nature as a field of scientific and conservationist endeavors, or as a domain necessitating preservation and protection from human societies. These conceptions of nature are contradictory primarily because people have diverse perceptions of the natural world and their relations to it. For example, a deer-hunter will have a different perspective of nature and the need for land and animal conservation than a person whose primary contact with non-domestic animal life is a visit to the city zoo, or viewing a television nature program. These conceptions represent the ongoing struggle in late-twentieth-century modern life to repeatedly evaluate and define humankind's relationship to the natural world.

Notes

1. This study of the Discovery Channel and its programming is part of an unpublished dissertation research study in which I analyze the thematic discourses represented in a week of prime-time programming on three leading cable television networks. Because of the obvious space limitations which accompany conference papers, this study will focus its analysis on the thematic discourses represented in a week of Discovery's prime-time nature programming. The primary data source for this study is prime-time programming (8:00-11:00pm, E.S.T.) from Sunday (July 26, 1998) to Saturday (August 1, 1998) on the U.S. Discovery Channel. This programming was recorded onto videocassettes in order to facilitate a close textual analysis of the programs.

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Ally McBeal vs. Hollywood's Male Gaze—Round One

Abstract

Through an explication of the female gazes underlying the narrative structure of the new Fox primetime television hit, Ally McBeal, this study argues that the wide appeal of the television series among women spectators can be explained by the polysemic nature of the narratives that "allows space for resistance and negotiation" (Fiske, 1986, p. 391), thus opening the text to a feminist reading. The mockery of sexism inherent in the female gaze underlies the series' narrative structure and functions as a device to expose the sexism of the male gaze and its hegemonic patriarchal constructions of female and male sexuality. The result is a subversive female gaze that challenges, resists and defies patriarchy, and it is precisely this appropriation of the dominant male gaze that offers women new spectatorship possibilities.

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Ally McBeal vs. Hollywood's Male Gaze—Round One

Not since former Vice President Dan Quayle's 1992 well-publicized attack on television's *Murphy Brown* has a series featuring a single professional woman generated as much controversy as the new Fox hit, *Ally McBeal.* When Murphy, a sitcom television news anchor, had a baby as a single mother, Quayle attached the show for "mocking the importance of fathers, by bearing a child alone, and calling it just another 'lifestyle choice'" (cited in Wines, 1992, p. A1). *Ally McBeal* is a "lite dramedy" (i.e., part drama, part comedy) whose title character plays a Generation X attorney at an unconventional law firm in Boston where a group of quirky characters — including her former lover Billy, and his new wife Georgia — also work (Katz, 1997, p. 36). In 1997, the first season of *Ally McBeal,* the weekly audience averaged around 12 million viewers (including 6 million men after *Monday Night Football* ended). The series won a Golden Globe for best comedy series, and its star, Calista Flockhart, won for best actress in a comedy series (Svetkey, 1998a). In 1998, the second season premiere drew 14.8 million viewers, the first time a series beat *Monday Night Football's* audience among 18-49 year-old viewers (Svetkey, 1998b, pp. 37-38). Ally McBeal is arguably the most popular female character on television today (Bellefante, 1998, p. 58), and her popularity has already spawned a new prime-time spin-off for fall 1999, *Ally*, a half-hour comedy version "repurposed" from previous episodes (Stein, 1999, p. 88).

Despite the series' popularity, viewers and critics have a love-hate relationship with *Ally McBeal*, with assessments divided along lines of whether the series' protagonist represents a "groundbreaking postfeminist television anthem for the New Woman of the '90s" or a "giant leap back for all womankind" (Svetkey, 1998a, p. 22). Benjamin Svetkey (1998a) of *Entertainment Weekly* applauded *Ally McBeal* for portraying the "rarest of TV anomalies: a brainy babe" (p. 22). But a more serious read on the Fox hit comes from *The New Republic's* Steven Stark (1997), who argued that *Ally McBeal* represented an "inner-directed 'feminine' drama" that has invaded the arena of TV dramas, one of the "remaining bastions of male authority on television" (p. 13). As Stark explained: "The show is important not so much for what its lead character says or does, but for what the program itself attempts and symbolizes. This is a drama about a woman, and such excursions have been surprisingly rare in the history of prime-time television" (p. 13).

In contrast, many women critics have taken the program to task for its alleged anti-feminist stance. Ruth Shalit (1998) of *The New Republic* condemned *Ally McBeal* as a "slap in the face of the real-life working girls, a weekly insult to the woman who wants sexual freedom and gender equality, who can date and litigate in the same week without collapsing in a Vagisil heap" (p. 27). The *Nation's* Allyssa Katz (1997) complained that *Ally McBeal* was nothing more than a lightweight series about the "self-destructive neuroses, childish foibles and desperate romantic needs of a female who appears to be fully grown, even if she does weigh about 100 pounds" (p. 36). *Time's* cover asked, "Is Feminism Dead?" and featured head shots of Ally McBeal with feminist leaders Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem. In the cover article, Ginia Bellefante (1998) complained that pop culture media such as *Ally McBeal* are "insistent on offering images of grown single women as frazzled, self-absorbed girls" (p. 58).[1]

Academic researchers also have voiced objections to the series' depiction of women, with some concluding that *Ally McBeal* perpetuates the same anti-feminist message underlying television's dominant representation of career women, including Murphy Brown: "[W]omen cannot be both successful personally and professionally," and careers are the wrong choice for women, leading only to "loneliness and dissatisfaction" (Leafe, 1998, p. 26). In a 1998 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* Leslie Heywood argued: "Under the guise of the hip and the new, Ally's story lines wittily erase feminism's hard-won gains by giving young women just a little bit of what we want. . . . *Ally* gives us a glimpse of empowerment, and uses our own confusion to compromise it" (p. B9). Yet even Heywood conceded that *Ally McBeal* was more complicated than its critics have been willing to acknowledge, pointing out that "Ally is uncannily effective in reaching its audience, and has a refutation of all the standard feminist critiques built right into its script" (Heywood, p. B9). As Veronica Chambers (1998) of *Time* observed:

> "Ally" has clearly struck a nerve with twentysomething women who feel both excited and confused by the choices bestowed upon them by the feminist movement. . . . It captures the sense of anxious expectation that people feel in their 20s, when most of life's important decisions still lie ahead. (p. 58)

Indeed, many viewers, especially women, do identify with the series' protagonist. Consider the following comments from "twentysomething" women working for law firms in Boston, where *Ally McBeal* is based. Angelique Magiulo applauded the program because it portrays Ally realistically, allowing her to be "weak and vulnerable. . . . A lot of us at my firm watch it religiously. We watch it as a comedy about this neurotic woman who makes us feel better about ourselves" (cited in Chambers, 1998, p. 59). Kathryn Loebs likes *Ally McBeal* because she can fantasize about doing things the protagonist does: "I was thinking during one courtroom scene that I couldn't imagine someone actually addressing a judge like that. But I would just love to do it. You think it would feel *sooo* good to do that" (cited in Chambers, p. 59).

Despite the critics, *Ally McBeal* is a hit among women, whose enthusiastic responses raise an intriguing research question: Why *do* women cheer the series' protagonist and identify with "frazzled" Ally and her seemingly "self-destructive neurosis, childish foibles and desperate romantic needs" (Bellefante, 1998, p. 58; Katz, 1997, p. 36)? Clearly, part of the show's appeal can be explained by the clever way the series is written to poke fun at female-male conventions and to expose inconsistencies and absurdities in social mores relating to gender. My study argues that *Ally McBeal's* popularity with women in particular resides in the polysemic nature of the narratives that open the text to a feminist reading. Although not intended as a feminist statement, according to its creator and scriptwriter David Kelley ("Fox's 'Ally McBeal,'' 1998), *Ally McBeal's* narratives nonetheless can be interpreted from the perspective of a subversive female gaze that function to disrupt the dominant male gaze of mainstream Hollywood.

Polysemy and Female Gazes as Strategies of Resistance

Expanding on the work of Umberto Eco (1980), John Fiske (1986) argued that television texts are polysemic, allowing spectators to exploit the unresolved contradictions of the texts in "order to find within them structural similarities to his or her own social relations and identity" (p. 320). In other words, spectators activate the text's "meaning potential differently. Thus, any one utterance can be a member of a number of different 'languages'" (p. 394). As one example, Fiske explains that a seemingly sexist or unliberated comment by a character "can be read as part of a traditional chauvinist discourse of gender," or as part of the "strategies of resistance or modification that change, subvert or reject the authoritatively proposed meanings" (p. 394). For instance, when Ally McBeal's secretary Elaine proudly calls herself a "slut," this can be read either as reinforcing traditional chauvinist discourse regarding feminine sexuality, or, oppositionally, as a strategy to challenge the dominant discourse and its inherent negative connotations assigned to sexually active women. Significantly, a polysemic text "allows space for resistance and negotiation," and thus Fiske admonished critics to examine the "contradictions and openness in the television text" (p. 391) in order to "identify the textual characteristics that make polysemic readings possible" (p. 394).

One method to explore the "contradictions and openness" in televisual texts is to explicate the female gaze that "allows space for resistance and negotiation" (Fiske, 1986, p. 391) of the male gaze. In her seminal work, Laura Mulvey (1975) asserted that the dominant male gazes in mainstream Hollywood films reflect and satisfy the male unconscious: because most filmmakers are male, the voyeuristic gaze of the camera is male. Consequently, Mulvey said, male characters in the film's narratives make women the objects of their gaze, and ultimately, the gaze of the spectator also reflects the voyeuristic male gazes of the camera and the male actors: "[W]omen are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (p. 11). The result is narratives that marginalize women and encourage spectator identification with male protagonists. Further, Mulvey argued that the patriarchal hegemony dominating Hollywood makes impossible a female gaze free of male constructs, and a feminist voice can only be found in feminist counter-cinema. Although Ussher (1997) agreed that the "masculine gaze" that "reifies the social position of 'man' within the traditional script of heterosexuality — the position of power, authority and sexualized control over 'woman,'" still dominates mainstream Hollywood media, she argued that just as women have resisted the Prince Charming fairy tales, they also have actively "reformulated and resisted the archetypal 'masculine gaze'" in media narratives (pp. 85-86).

Lorraine Gamman (1989) also argued that women spectators may reject the male gaze and, instead, identify with a female gaze they read in the media narratives. Further, Gamman suggested that Mulvey's work, as well as other psychoanalytical investigations of women's media experiences (e.g., Metz, 1975/1982), do not conceptualize female sexuality adequately: "[J]ust how useful is the [psychoanalytic] theory for studying female spectatorship if it cannot adequately formulate the significance of the active female experience except in terms that assume a masculine position in language" (p. 24). Lucie Arbuthnot and Gail Seneca (1990) agreed, asserting that feminist media research that concentrates on "male paradigms and male pleasure, even if only to challenge them, may simply miss the mark if our goal is to understand and affirm our own pleasure" (p. 124). In fact, in her later work, Mulvey (1989) addressed the problems of approaching spectatorship from her earlier perspective, acknowledging that it limits researchers to an "either/or" polarization of the male gaze versus the female object of the gaze, and to constant skepticism that all female media roles reinforce patriarchal forms of spectator identity. "There is a sense in which this argument, important as it is for analysing the existing state of things, hinders the possibility of change and remains caught ultimately within its own dualistic terms," she said (p. 162). [2]

One example of a text that "allows space for resistance and negotiation" (Fiske, 1986, p. 391), is found in Arbuthnot and Seneca's (1990) feminist reading of the 1953 movie, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, starring Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell. Arbuthnot and Seneca demonstrated that media narratives produced by men and reflecting what seems to be a male gaze can be read oppositionally as representing instead a text that resists patriarchal definition and male objectification. They argued that despite the "superficial story of heterosexual romance" (p. 113) in this movie, the romantic escapades of the film's characters are "continually disrupted and undermined" (p. 116) by a more central text that is articulated through the women's resistance to male objectification and their connection to each other.

The result is a "feminist text which both denies men pleasure to some degree, and more importantly, celebrates women's pleasure in each other" (p. 113). For instance, although Monroe and Russell are certainly "spectacles for male attention," they "return the look," actively invading male space and making the male characters "spectacles" for women's attention; in so doing, they refuse to yield to the male gaze (p. 116): "By becoming active themselves, they make it impossible for men to act upon them. They are actors and initiators in their relations with men" (p. 117).

Gamman (1989), in her articulation of a female gaze in the television series *Cagney & Lacey*, made a similar argument, that through the use of female protagonists and women-centered themes, media narratives may resist patriarchal construction by appropriating the male gaze, and representing instead a female gaze that "articulates *mockery of machismo*" (p. 15). As a narrative strategy, mockery expresses a "coherent, if not controlling, female gaze" that effects "a fissure in the representation of power itself" (Gamman, p. 15), thus disrupting male dominance. For example, in *Cagney & Lacey*, the female gaze is developed from the point of view of police detectives Christine Cagney (Sharon Gless) and Mary Beth Lacey (Tyne Daly), who articulate it through "witty put-downs of male aspirations for total control" (p. 15). Gamman explained that Isbecki — the "macho bore" male character — represents a "conscious narrative device employed to illustrate sexism in the workplace," but his sexism is subverted through a female gaze that mocks his macho behaviors (Gamman, p. 15). This "playfulness" of the female gaze disrupts rather than assumes dominance in the narratives and illustrates in a "witty and amusing way why the male gaze is sexist," inviting spectators to join in mockery of sexism (Gamman, p. 16). Significantly, Gless and Daly are not merely passive objects for male voyeurism: "[T]hey 'speak' female desire. *They look back*" (p. 16). And although Arbuthnot and Seneca (1990) did not focus on mockery in their critique of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, they nonetheless point out that the depiction of some of the male characters as "ludicrous sap[s]" (p. 119) is a strategy to further subvert the male gaze, which fits Gamman's concept of mockery as a resistance strategy.

Such images represent important shifts in mainstream Hollywood ideology and are particularly appealing to women spectators because the focus is on "female *activity* rather than on female *sexuality*," and on narratives embedded in "general philosophies about meaning *spoken* through the female protagonists" (Gamman, 1989, pp. 19, 21). This, in turn, provides new opportunities for female spectatorship. It is important to note, however, that neither Arbuthnot and Seneca (1990) nor Gamman are suggesting that a female gaze can be achieved by simple role reversals, or solely by featuring women protagonists (e.g. *Charlie's Angels*) or because women are behind the cameras. Further, they cautioned, a female gaze cannot completely replace the dominant male gaze of mainstream Hollywood.

Rather, these scholars are suggesting ways in which female gazes that privilege women's perspectives are able to "cohabit the space" occupied by the male gaze, while simultaneously subverting the dominant gaze within mainstream conventions (Gamman, p. 16).

Further, in contrast to Mulvey (1975), Gamman (1989) asserted that a female gaze can be "articulated in the context of masculinist ideologies" (p. 18), as the gaze negotiates "hierarchies of discourse about 'masculinity' and 'femininity' within the narrative itself" from a "feminist sub-text" that "alters the dynamics" of power relations between women and men (p. 16). As Kathleen Rowe (1997) explained, for instance, "By returning the male gaze, we might expose (make a spectacle of) the gazer" (p. 77). Similarly, Arbuthnot and Seneca (1990) asserted: "It is the tension between male objectification of women, and women's resistance to that objectification, that opens *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* to a feminist reading," transforming it into a "profoundly feminist text" (p. 123). In other words, the polysemic nature of a media text opens spaces for feminist negotiations that challenge the dominant patriarchal reading.

Like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* and *Cagney & Lacey, Ally McBeal* is a product of mainstream Hollywood and its patriarchal environment. As the program's creator David Kelley, cautioned, "We never endeavored to create this role model for feminism or prototype for modern women" (cited in "Fox's 'Ally McBeal,'" 1998, p. 8). Kelley further explained that Ally McBeal is not a "a hard, strident feminist out of the '60s and '70s. She's all for women's rights, but she doesn't want to lead the charge at her own emotional expense" (cited in Bellefante, 1988, p. 58). "I cringe when people ask me how I write women characters," Kelley complained. "The truth is, I just write them the same way I write men," (cited in Svetkey, 1998a, p. 24). In fact, Kelley writes or co-writes all of the scripts for the series, and the "voice of Kelley's is always indelibly, inimitably his own" (Svetkey, 1998b, p. 37). This prompted Shalit (1998) to conclude that *Ally McBeal* depicts a male point of view, complaining that the television series is "manipulative and infantile and demeaning," representing nothing more than a "male producer's fantasy of feminism" (p. 27). Svetkey (1998a) concurred that the program definitely represents a "male point of view" (p. 24). He (1998b) asserted, however, that despite representing a male point of view, *Ally McBeal* is "subversive: a series that sneakily explores male preoccupations (one typical episode delved into the eternal question, Does Size Matter?) by filtering them through a female perspective. In other words, a guy show dressed up in chick-show clothing" (p. 37). My study argues that it is precisely the polysemic nature of the series' exploration of "male preoccupations" through a female perspective that challenges a "male point of view" and opens *Ally McBeal* to a feminist reading.

The following section discusses the specific strategies that articulate female gazes and structure the mockery of sexism within the series' narratives, thus presenting audiences with new spectatorship possibilities, particularly for women. The analysis of the female gaze directs this feminist critique of *Ally McBeal* away from the ways the series' narrative structure "affords pleasure or denies pleasure, to men," and turns us instead toward ways in which women gain pleasure from media texts (Arbuthnot & Seneca, 1990, p. 123). My discussion will demonstrate how mainstream television series "can facilitate a dominant female gaze and a route whereby feminist meanings can be introduced in order to disturb the status quo" (Gamman, 1989, p. 12). As Heywood (1998) argued, media critics "need to explore the cultural forces that produce such a character" as Ally McBeal and the "legion of fans who hang on her every word" (p. B9), rather than writing off the series as nothing more than a "giant leap back for all womankind" (Svetkey, 1998a, p. 22).

***Ally McBeal* as a Feminist Text**

After analyzing the 23 episodes that aired during *Ally McBeal's* first season (1997-1998), I identified two key areas in which narratives are structured around the female gaze as mockery of sexism, thus representing subversive strategies that resist the dominant male gaze: women's sexuality and men's sexuality. In each area, women are granted agency to challenge society's and media's double standard that, as Faludi (1991) argued, celebrates men with active sex lives as heroes, and "punishes" women who behave similarly. The female gaze in *Ally McBeal* is developed through strategies similar to those used by women comics, whereby gender ideals are questioned by lampooning them (Gilbert, 1997),[3] thus opening a space for spectators to "change, subvert or reject" dominant patriarchal meanings (Fiske, 1986, p. 394).

Unapologetic Women "Return the Look"

Like the protagonists in *Cagney & Lacey* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the women of *Ally McBeal* refuse to yield to the male gaze. Instead, they "'speak' female desire. *They look back*" (Gamman, 1989, p. 16), appropriating the male gaze by making men objects for their gaze while at the same time mocking the inherent sexism of the male gaze and its objectification of women. Ally and the other women characters actively invade male space when they "return the look" and turning the tables, make the men "spectacles" (Arbuthnot & Seneca, 1990, p. 116). In other words, "By returning the male gaze, we might expose (make a spectacle of) the gazer" (Rowe, 1997, p. 77). For example, Ally's roommate, Renée, is unapologetic for her own open sexuality, combining "unabashed seductiveness with a gutsy independence," as Kaplan (1987) has described Madonna, another unapologetic woman (p. 245). Renée is proud of her sexuality and aggressively pursues men in a way more often associated with men than with women. Elaine, the law firm's secretary, also is unapologetic regarding her active sex life and unashamedly refers to herself as a "slut." For example, in one episode Elaine offers to console her boss Richard Fish by being "here for you physically" while he's between relationships and facing the "throes of sexual frustration." By embracing the term "slut," Elaine denies its negative connotations and recasts the word in the same celebratory frame accorded to men with active sex lives, a strategy that represents her liberation from the sexual repression of women inherent in patriarchy. With a polysemic text, what at first reading may seem a representation of women submitting to stereotypes (such as bimbos or sluts) can be read instead as a "thinly veiled indictment" of patriarchal society (Walker, cited in Barreca, 1991, p. 185; Fiske, 1986).

Perhaps the most obvious development of female gaze as mockery of sexism in the narrative structure of *Ally McBeal* is articulated through Ally's relationships with male characters in the series. Although the narratives often depict Ally as frustrated by not being in a committed relationship with a man, she nonetheless is accorded agency to take control of her own sexuality. Further, because the series permits us to share Ally's private thoughts and fantasies, spectators are voyeurs to Ally's lustful objectification of men. For example, viewers often see Ally's computer-generated tongue enlarge, reaching across a room to lick the ear of a man she finds sexually attractive. Other times her fantasies are more graphic, such as the time we see Ally imagine sex with the 19-year-old client she's defending, later explaining to Renée that her young client has her "in heat."

More significant is Ally's unapologetic stance toward being attracted to men for purely sexual reasons, or for having "meaningless" sex outside the confines of a committed relationship — sexual freedom that has typically been reserved for men, both in society and in the media. For example, in the one episode when her law firm colleagues criticize Ally for becoming involved with a client, she retorts: "Where does it say that women can't act like men sometimes? I saw a piece of meat and I said to myself, 'You only live once. Be a man'" (Kelley, 1997a). Her attitude not only represents her liberation from sexual repression, but simultaneously mocks the objectification of women underlying the male gaze: When such behavior seems out of bounds for a woman, it suddenly becomes clear how it is unseemly for a man.

Although Ally's unapologetic sexuality is often a theme in the series, this challenge to the male gaze and its inherent sexism is perhaps best illustrated in an episode titled, "Cro-Magnon" (Kelley, 1998a), in which Ally and the other women characters appropriate the male gaze by making the naked male model in Ally and Renée's sculpting class the object of their gazes. From the time Ally and Renée first see Glenn drop his towel to pose nude for the sculpting students, the well-endowed model with a "trunk the size of Dumbo's" is a continuing source of admiration and lust among the women characters, in conversations that mimic men's locker-room discussions. For example, although Georgia is happily married to Billy, she eagerly enrolls in the class after hearing about Glenn's unique attributes. As she stares lustfully at the nude Glenn, Georgia advises Ally: "I'm married and off the market. But if I was single . . . . I would just ask him out."

Ally's conscious decision to have a one-night stand with Glenn provides the ultimate challenge to the male gaze. Although never hesitant to admit that she would like to have sex with Glenn, Ally is a bit uncomfortable with the reality that while she's interested in being sexually gratified, she does not want to get involved with the model. When Ally confides her concerns to Renée, her roommate reminds her of all the men who have been interested in Renée solely because of her breast size. Ally counters: "It's not the same. . . . We're women, we have double standards to live up to," a line used to mock the inherent sexism in the patriarchal standards of sexuality for women and men. Ally is able to overcome her reservations when she learns that Glenn is moving away in a few days, thus alleviating her fears about future complications. After their evening of passion, Ally remains unapologetic for her choices, congratulating herself on her first sexual experience with a man she did not want to "wake up to in the morning." Thus, Ally not only asserts her right to be an initiator and actor in her relations with men and her decisions about her sexuality — including the right to a one-night stand — but simultaneously mocks the double standard that deems this behavior acceptable for men. Further, her concern over being interested in Glenn solely as a "piece of meat" is used to mock men who objectify women similarly.

It is important at this point to address the computer-animated "dancing baby" who appears as Ally's hallucination and haunts her throughout this episode. Ally struggles to understand the significance of the hallucination, and Renée suggests that the baby symbolizes either Ally's ticking biological clock or her guilt over wanting to have a one-night stand with Glenn. In other words, the baby represents patriarchal containment of femininity. What is most significant for this analysis, however, is that when Ally confronts the "dancing baby" by challenging him after her sexual encounter with Glenn, patriarchal power is disrupted and viewers watch Ally dance in celebration of her triumph over both her fears and her societal constraints.

The mockery of sexism and celebration of women's sexual freedom also is developed through the character of Whipper Cone (Dyan Cannon), a judge romantically involved with Richard Fish, Ally's boss, and the senior partner of the law firm. Whipper is nearing 60, while Fish's character has not turned 30, which in itself challenges the male gaze that deems older women less sexually attractive, while older men continue to play the romantic interests of much younger women even into their 70s.[4] In *Ally McBeal*, however, it is precisely Whipper's age and its physical consequences that Fish finds sexually appealing. In fact, he is sexually aroused by her neck wattle, one artifact of aging that is more usually the subject of distaste (or cosmetic surgery) than of sexual desire. Throughout the series' first season, spectators often see Fish caressing Whipper's throat. As Fish explains to Ally, "That's what I go for with older women — the loose skin on the neck, the hint of a wattle. There's nothing more arousing for me, the way it just hangs there" (Kelley, 1998c). His attraction to older women is not limited to Whipper. For example, in the same episode, "Janet Reno" visits Boston, and Fish finds himself unable to resist the Attorney General's wattle, a transgression that results in Whipper ending their relationship because she won't tolerate his fooling around with other women's wattles. But Whipper remains in control of their relationship and her own sexuality to the end, encouraging Fish to caress her wattle as she ends their relationship. "Did you enjoy that?" she asks Fish. When Fish breathlessly replies, "Yes," Whipper says, "Then remember it. Because that was the last time. Good-bye, Richard" (Kelley, 1998b).

What is most relevant about *Ally McBeal* from a feminist perspective is that the narratives are structured around the mockery of male gazes, and, further, simultaneously accord women agency: "By becoming active themselves, they make it impossible for men to act upon them. They are actors and initiators in their relations with men" (Arbuthnot & Seneca, 1990, p. 117). By depicting women who use the "spectacle already invested in them as objects of a masculine gaze" to disrupt and challenge patriarchal construction (Rowe, 1995, p. 11), the *Ally* women assign this *"to-be-looked-at-ness"* aspect of the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11) to men. In other words, rather than being objectified by the men in the television series, the women "'speak' female desire" (Gamman, 1989, p. 16), refusing to yield to the male gaze (Arbuthnot & Seneca).

Unapologetic Women Disrupt Hegemonic Masculinity

Female gaze as mockery of the sexist male gaze also disrupts patriarchal construction of masculinity in *Ally McBeal* through exaggerated humorous depictions of chauvinist attitudes and behaviors and through scenes that overtly question male sexuality, both of which function as subversive narrative devices to encourage viewers' participation in the humorous ridicule of sexist behaviors and traditional definitions of masculinity. For instance, John Cage, the film's other senior partner and most successful attorney, must struggle to find the courage to ask women for dates, a representation that overtly resists patriarchal definitions of masculinity. Richard Fish often is depicted as an unenlightened male chauvinist in ways that function to mock chauvinism and men's objectification of women, much like Isbecki, the "macho bore" in *Cagney & Lacey*. As another example, after Georgia enrolls in the sculpting class with Ally and Renee, Billy worries about the size of his penis, whether he satisfies Georgia sexually, and later finds himself unable to "perform" in bed. In each case, the male gaze is disrupted through a female gaze that mocks sexism and patriarchal construction.

Importantly, the "playfulness" of the female gaze disrupts male dominance by illustrating in a "witty and amusing way why the male gaze is sexist," inviting viewers to join the mockery (Gamman, p. 16).

In the "Cro-Magnon" episode (Kelley, 1998a), Billy's concern over his "size" and performance mocks the male gaze on two levels. When Billy, an attractive, "*GQ*-model type," admits his insecurities regarding his sexual performance, the very essence of male prowess is challenged. Try to imagine Sam, the celebrated womanizer from the television series *Cheers*, ever confessing any bedroom anxieties or, asking women, as Billy does—"Does size really matter?" At the same time, spectators, particularly women, are encouraged to interpret this insecurity through a female perspective, extrapolating Billy's concerns about his "size" to women's insecurities about the size of their breasts and their sexual attractiveness. For women, it's entertaining to see the tables turned and watch men endure the kinds of anxieties women have felt, as Georgia comments to Billy after his inability to make love: "You being insecure. It makes me feel great. . . the idea of you being insecure with me, instead of me being insecure with you, it feels good."

It's significant that two sub-plots running through this episode involving another male domain — masculine competition — also are the object of mockery in the narratives: the trial of the 19-year-old client Ally and John are defending, and a boxing match. The client is charged with assault after punching his date's former boyfriend when he calls her derogatory names. There's no question that the client did in fact hit the former boyfriend. But when John presents his summation to the jury, he frames his argument around the need for men to stand up to bullies. The diminutive John Cage describes being pushed around by bigger males his entire life, and then finally standing up to a bully he encounters in a bar, knocking the bully to the floor. "As a man, medieval as it may sound, the most satisfying moment of my life was that punch." John explains. "Am I embarrassed about it, absolutely. But it is a fundamental truth? Yes, a truth of man's human nature." In other words, "man's true nature" is mockingly equated with the "Cro-Magnon" man.

The mockery of the "truth of man's human nature" continues as the male attorneys in the law firm get themselves pumped up for the big boxing match. While all of the women except Elaine express their contempt for seeing boxers "trying to kill each other," the men cast their bets and smoke their cigars as they enthusiastically anticipate the match. Ally expresses her disbelief that men could really enjoy this spectacle, explaining: "Their fathers probably tell them it's masculine to enjoy grown men beating on each other so they go with it as kids. Then rather than admit they were stupid, they just pretend to keep liking it until they die." As the episode ends, spectators see the men, along with Elaine, cheering on the boxing opponents as they pummel each other, while Georgia looks away in disgust.

Although here the narrative mocks the machismo inherent in patriarchal masculinity, on another level it also represents female resistance to patriarchal construction. In this sub-plot, aligning Elaine with the men functions as a subversive narrative strategy to represent her rejection of hegemonic definitions of appropriate feminine behavior, just as her embracing the term "slut" rejects patriarchal constructions of female sexuality. The disruption of power is further articulated through the juxtaposition of the fight sequences with the shots of Ally and Glenn making love on her living room floor: as the men cling to hegemonic definitions of sexuality and gender roles, Ally and Elaine defy those boundaries, actively invading male space.

In a follow-up episode to "Cro-Magnon" entitled "The Blame Game" (Kelley, 1998b), mockery of male sexuality again structures the narrative, when Ally runs into Glenn and realizes he lied to her about moving from Boston. Ally's anger is soon replaced with empathy, however, when Glenn explains that he did not try to see her again because he felt like a "cheap one-night stand," a sentiment generally associated with women. "Let's face it," Glenn says, "You could've asked me to stay the night. We made love in the living room. I didn't even see your bedroom. And afterwards, I could read your face. 'Time for you to go now'." After hearing Glenn's confession about feeling like her "boy-toy," Ally invites him to her apartment and they make love for a second time. Later, Ally tells Renee that she thinks she really likes Glenn and just as she's seriously considering the possibility of a relationship with him, Glenn dumps her, explaining that he only wanted to make love to her again to prove to himself that he wasn't just another "one-night stand." By shifting women's frustrations with being used by men merely for sex to the character of Glenn, the narrative again functions to mock the male gaze. Importantly, the narrative does not suggest that women should treat men as one-night stands, rather, it encourages spectators to see the scenario through a female perspective, to see the sexism inherent in a double standard that winks at this sexual behavior in men, but condemns it in women.

Now it's Ally who feels used, but with Renée's help, she has her revenge with their "penguin" strategy. On the pretense of wanting to make love to Glenn, Renée asks him on a date. Glenn eagerly agrees to this one-night stand and they drive to a park where Ally and Georgia are waiting in a prearranged spot to watch the revenge unfold. As they walk to a wooded area, Renée unzips Glenn's pants, and when his pants and underwear are around his ankles, she tells him to follow her. As spectators watch Glenn waddling "like a penguin" in order to have what he expects to be a sexual encounter with Renée, we are encouraged to identify with the Ally and to participate vicariously in the mockery — to laugh with the *Ally* women — as we eagerly anticipate the moment when their revenge is revealed to Glenn. By exposing Glenn's deceit about not wanting to be a one-night stand while also being eager for meaningless sex with Renée, the narratives effectively mock male objectification of women as sexual beings and in turn, represent women's refusal to yield to the male gaze, all of which illustrates the female gaze embedded in the text: "By becoming active themselves, they make it impossible for men to act upon them" (Arbuthnot & Seneca, 1990, p. 117).

Themes of using women for casual sex and men's justification for this behavior are frequently targets of ridicule in *Ally McBeal*. In one particularly provocative episode, John Cage is arrested for soliciting a prostitute and justifies his behavior as being "more honest" and as showing "more respect" to women than having meaningless sex with a woman he doesn't love (Kelley, 1997a). In the same episode, Ally angrily confronts Billy when she learns that he slept with a prostitute during his bachelor party the night before his marriage to Georgia. Billy's excuses infuriate Ally, as the following exchange illustrates:

Billy:	"It was nothing. It meant nothing."
Ally:	"Oh, and I suppose if Georgia had been with a male hooker you wouldn't be upset?"
Billy:	"It's not the same."
Ally:	"Oh, how is it not the same?"
Billy:	"Excuse me for being gender-biased, but women don't have the same sex drive thing. I don't care what the editors of *Cosmopolitan* say. . . . . And, I might add, it's more of a betrayal when women cheat because with women, sex is more mental. There's a cerebral thing going on. With men, a lot of the time, it's just body parts and that's what it was that night."
Ally:	"I can't believe the things I am hearing coming out of your mouth. But then again, considering where it's been, I guess I shouldn't be surprised!"

The men's justifications for using women merely for sex seem juvenile, and ultimately represent a narrative device that mocks their behavior while simultaneously exposing women's inherent sexual marginalization within patriarchy (Gamman, 1989, p. 15). As Georgia later explains to Ally, "Men will throw away their whole lives for sex. . . . They don't even care if we have heads."

Similar to the strategies of female comedians (Gilbert, 1997), the women of *Ally McBeal* ridicule a "society that creates ideals for appearance and behavior as well as individuals who subscribe to those standards" (Gilbert, p. 319). Such social critique often is "articulated in a comedic context" (Gilbert, p. 317) such as *Ally McBeal* because the humorous text not only allows spectators to participate in the mockery without feeling alienated by the social critique, but "simultaneously advances agendas and disavows its own rhetorical potency" (Gilbert, p. 328). Further, as Diana Meehan (1983, p. 113) found in her study of television's depiction of female characters, female autonomy has generally been represented in television series as a destructive force or a threat to society (also see Dow, 1996; Faludi, 1991). In *Ally McBeal*, however, female autonomy is celebrated, and the threat to social order is humorously attributed to patriarchal attempts to contain women's autonomy and sexual freedom.

Female vs. Male Gaze: And the Winner is . . .

Both female and male gazes may comprise a media text, but since Hollywood texts have been dominated by male gazes, one result of female gazes that depict patriarchal resistance is a struggle among competing gazes (Gamman, 1989; Arbuthnot and Seneca, 1990). *Ally McBeal* is no exception: male objectification and patriarchal containment compete with the strategies of resistance in the series' polysemic narratives. As Arbuthnot and Seneca's critique of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* demonstrated, it is precisely this "tension between male objectification of women, and women's resistance to that objectification" — in other words, the tension between female and male gazes — that opens media narratives to a feminist reading (p. 123). For instance, despite Ally's success as an attorney, she laments that she is single, and is frequently shown returning to her apartment alone to sleep with her fake inflatable "man," while Elaine reveals that she flaunts her sexuality because it's the only way she knows how to keep men interested, all of which seems to suggest that "heterosexual love is crucial for women" (Arbuthnot & Seneca, p. 122). Georgia cuts her long blonde hair to make a feminist statement. And Renée's unabashed seductiveness leads to her trial on assault charges after she defends herself against a date who won't take "no" for an answer, scenarios more indicative of a sexist male male than a subversive female gaze. Spectators may, however, "adopt this masculine spectatorship or abdicate spectatorship for an identification with the femininity on screen" (Squire, 1997, p. 103), thus demonstrating the polysemic nature of television texts.

As Gamman (1989) explained, the male gaze cannot be completely replaced, and female gazes "articulated in the context of masculinist ideologies" (p. 18) such as those evident in *Ally McBeal* must negotiate a "feminist subtext" that resists patriarchal "hierarchies of discourse about 'masculinity' and 'femininity' within the narrative." It is this resistance through humorous contexts in *Ally McBeal* that "alters the dynamics" of power in the series: "[I]n the same way that 'M*A*S*H' could only deal with Vietnam by moving the war to Korea and tempering the drama with wisecrack humor, 'Ally McBeal' couches its serious questions about being a woman in the workplace in exaggerated fantasies, oddball characters, and silly scenarios" (Stark, 1997, p. 13). Indeed, critics such as those cited in the introduction seem to be missing the irony of the series' use of comedic conventions and mockery as subversive narrative devices to expose sexism and its consequences for women in American society. It is precisely the "exaggerated fantasies, oddball characters" and the dialogue of the "silly scenarios" that function both to disrupt the patriarchal power structure and to neutralize the "feminist criticism of larger issues by making the ideas behind that critique sound silly," thereby encouraging women to "identify with Ally, whose petty frustrations, to one extent or another, we may have experienced ourselves" (Heywood, 1998, p. B9). Indeed, humorous narratives have the potential to provide a space to make "visible and laughable . . . the dilemmas of femininity" within patriarchy (Russo, cited in Rowe, 1997, p. 77).

Implications for Feminist Spectatorship

The goal of my study was not to investigate the male gaze or the ways in which *Ally McBeal* "affords pleasure, or denies pleasure to men" (Arbuthnot & Seneca, 1990, p. 123). Rather, my interest was in focusing "more centrally on our own experiences as female viewers than on the male viewer's experience," following the dictum of Arbuthnot and Seneca that feminist media criticism needs to "move beyond the analysis of male pleasure in viewing" media texts "in order to destroy it, to an explanation of female pleasure, in order to enhance it" (p. 123). And as the previous discussion has shown, there is a great deal about *Ally McBeal* that enhances pleasure for women viewers.

Perhaps the female gazes represented in *Ally McBeal* are appealing to women viewers because they are so rare in the media. Women also may appreciate Ally because the female gazes of this television series encourage women to identify with "the spectacle of women acting like men" (Willis, 1993, p. 125). Similarly, the female gazes structuring the episodes' narratives exemplify what Jackie Stacey (1991) described as "[p]leasure in feminist power" (p. 148), the courage to challenge the constraints of a male-dominated society. For the many women fans of *Ally McBeal*, the mockery of the female gaze that objectifies men by making them targets of humor (Gilbert, 1997) may function to create a "strategic community, a moment at which a shared subjectivity that excludes men is created . . . placing men in the audience in the position women have traditionally occupied" and subsequently producing circumstances in which "women may find a sense of empowerment through a sense of shared subjectivity" (Auslander, 1993, p. 321). And this represents the type of feminist reading available to viewers in the polysemic narratives of *Ally McBeal*: "By transgressing boundaries and inviting women to be the laughers rather than the laughed-at," narratives can subversively attack "hegemonic power and privilege" (Gilbert, p. 328) and the "underlying message is that the standards — and those who enforce them — are at fault" (Walker, 1987, p. 125-126).

Unfortunately, *Ally McBeal's* second season (i.e., "round two") has seen producer and scriptwriter David Kelley introduce new characters and plots that threaten to negate the challenges to patriarchy articulated through female gazes during the first season, and the pleasure these challenges afforded women. Whipper has been replaced as Fish's love interest with a much younger Asian woman, Ling Woo, who is depicted in stereotypical "Dragon Lady" scenarios. Renée's unapologetic sexuality has been somewhat "tamed" (as well as her previously unruly hair), and Ally can't seem to control herself when she's around her former lover, Billy. Ling and another new female character who joined the law firm during the second season, Nelle Porter, have introduced a level of competition and cattiness among women largely absent from the first season. And the second season finale depicted a "desperate and dateless" Ally, emotionally devastated because she has not found the man of her dreams. These changes to the series are discouraging, and perhaps illustrate the difficulty of maintaining narratives that challenge and disrupt the patriarchal environment that dominates Hollywood. However, at the same time as I lament these changes, my women students will not allow me to forget how truly polysemic the text is when they discuss their positive responses to the season finale, explaining they feel "exactly like Ally," and how watching Ally confront weekly crises in her relationships and at her workplace makes them feel more empowered in their own lives.

Such contradictory interpretations, like those cited in the introduction, indicate that *Ally McBeal's* brand of feminism "will filter through the multiple subjectivities of spectatorship" (Squire, 1997, p. 103). Clearly, whether *Ally McBeal* represents a feminist text is a question that can be debated, and, is dependent on how the individual spectator reads the text. But conflicting opinions on this point demonstrate the polysemic nature of the series' narratives and, in turn, challenge the "idea that there should be one monolithic view about feminism," hence forcing a recognition of the "plurality" of feminisms available to women (Gamman, 1989, p. 26). Regardless of our views of *Ally McBeal* as a feminist text and despite any of David Kelley's intentions or goals for the program and its protagonist, the television series and its characters resonate with many women viewers precisely because they find in *Ally McBeal,* narratives and female characters actively challenging patriarchal conventions rarely available in the mass media. As this statement from one of my women students reveals: "I appreciate the women's defiance of the double standard by ogling men and admitting that they respond to purely sexual urges. Perhaps if men see what it's like to be on the other side of the coin (the one who is the victim of the one-night stand, etc.), maybe they will be less likely to dish it out."

Notes

[1] This *Time* issue generated 2,004 letters, the third highest reader response to a *Time* feature ("The box score," 1999).

[2] For additional spectatorship research, see for example: Bobo (1988); Byars (1988); de Lauretis (1984; 1986; 1987; 1991); Doane (1987); Ellsworth (1986); Gamman (1989); Gledhill (1988, 1991); Griggers (1993); Kaplan (1983); Mayne (1993); Metz (1975/1982); Pribram (1988); Stacey (1991); Staiger (1992); Studlar (1990); and, Willis (1993).

[3] For additional research on women comic's subversive use of humor as social commentary that challenges patriarchy, also see: Auslander (1993); Barreca (1991; 1992); Dudden (1987); Landay (1998); Mellencamp (1997); Rowe (1995; 1997); and, Walker (1987; 1988).

[4] Consider the age differences between actors is these recent films: Warren Beatty (61) and Halle Berry (29), *Bulworth*; Michael Douglas (53) and Gwyneth Paltrow (25), *A Perfect Murder*; Harrison Ford (55) and Anne Heche (29), *6 Days/7 Nights*; and, Robert Redford (60) and Kristin Scott-Thomas (37), *The Horse Whisperer*. ("Yuck. He's old," 1998).

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THE AMERICAN GIRL DOLLS:
CONSTRUCTING AMERICAN GIRLHOOD THROUGH REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

The American Girl dolls, books, and related products—created, manufactured, and marketed by Pleasant Company of Middleton, Wisconsin—is an enormously successful line of girls' paraphernalia that, until recently, was sold only by mail-order catalog. Through textual analysis of the catalogs and books, this paper attempts to understand how an "American girl" identity is constructed through these products, and how meaning is produced in these texts through the representation of a particular version of past and present American girlhood.

INTRODUCTION

> We give girls chocolate cake with vitamins. Our books are exciting, our magazine is fun, and our dolls are pretty. But most importantly, they all give girls a sense of self and an understanding of where they came from and who they are today. (Pleasant T. Rowland in Pleasant Company web site, 1998).

In 1985 Pleasant T. Rowland, "a former teacher and textbook author" (Pleasant Company, 1998), founded Pleasant Company. With a staff of four people, the company developed three "historical" dolls and their books: Kirsten, Samantha and Molly. The dolls did not represent actual historical characters. They were historical in the sense that they represent a period in U.S. history. Kirsten was called "a pioneer girl of strength and spirit" from 1854. Samantha was defined as "a bright Victorian beauty" of 1904, and Molly—"a lovable schemer and dreamer"— represented the WWII year of 1944. These dolls, books, and related merchandise were sold only by mail order catalog. In 1990 the company introduced "spunky, spritely colonial" Felicity of 1774. Two years later Addy, the only African American doll, came along. Defined as "a courageous girl of the Civil War," she was historically placed in 1864. In 1997, Pleasant Company introduced its newest doll, Josefina—"an Hispanic girl of heart and hope"—who was situated in 1824 New Mexico. These six dolls, their books (each doll has six books), and assorted related merchandise —which includes clothes, furniture, accessories, and matching outfits for girls—comprise Pleasant Company's The American Girls Collection.

Today, the company has other product lines which are also sold exclusively by catalog: (1) American Girl of Today, which consists of "contemporary " dolls. Girls can choose their doll from 20 different combinations of hair texture, some facial features—such as wider nose and oblique eyes—and skin, hair and eye colors. These dolls come with blank books for girls to write in. Clothing, furniture and accessories are also available for them. (2) The Bitty Baby Collection, five babies that represent different ethnicities—African American, Brunette Caucasian, Blond Caucasian, Asian American and Hispanic— are offered along with clothing, accessories and furniture needed for baby care. (3) American Girl Library which includes a bimonthly magazine and more than a dozen titles such as *Bright Ideas from Girls, for Girls*, *Super Slumber Parties* and *Oops! The Manners Guide for Girls*. (4) American Girl Gear which consists of a line of clothes and accessories for girls ages 7 to 12.

Pleasant Company has also created The American Girls Club and sponsors special events and programs such as "Samantha's Ice Cream Social," "Welcome Josefina!" and "The American Girls Fashion Show." It also boasts a set of museum programs which include "Felicity in Williamsburg," "Kirsten in Gammelgården," "Addy at Ohio Village," "Molly at Strawbery Banke Museum," "Samantha at the Heurich House Museum" and "Samantha at Greenfield Village." The company has its own web page and even sells an interactive CD-ROM.

The company is a huge success. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, Mattel's Barbie and Pleasant Company controlled more than 40 percent of the 1996 U.S. doll Market.[1] Having sold 48 million books and more than 4 million dolls, the company amassed sales of $287 million in 1997 (Hellmich, 1998). Its success can also be measured by the amount of competition it has produced. Companies such as Global Friends, The Magic Attic Club, and Just Pretend have all copied the concept of selling dolls exclusively by mail catalog. Each of their dolls also comes with books, costumes, furniture and accessories.

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1. It must be noted that Barbie's annual sales of approximately $900 million were three times larger than Pleasant Company's (Vargas, 1997).

In June of 1998, Pleasant Company was acquired by Mattel Inc. Jill Barad, Mattel's chairperson, has promised that Pleasant Company will be kept as a separate, autonomous unit headed by its founder and the company's headquarters will remain in Middleton, Wisconsin. The deal, in which Mattel paid a hefty price tag of $700 million, made Rowland Mattel's vice-chairperson and earned her a spot as a candidate in *Good Housekeeping*'s "30th annual most admired women poll" (1998). The outcome is an interesting alliance between two very different companies. A small, direct marketing company whose products were created specifically as an alternative to the big company's prime product, Barbie, and a large company which is responding to signs that the retail toy business may be weakening (Bannon, 1998).

Two other important changes occurred in 1998 which were not related to Mattel's purchase (Hajewski, 1998[a]; Levine, 1998). In July, Pleasant Company opened its first outlet store in Wisconsin, dedicated to the AG Gear line of clothing. In November, American Girl Place opened its doors, "the only place in the world where American Girl dolls can be bought on site" (Hajewski, 1998[b], p. 1). This huge store, located in Chicago, includes a boutique, a bookstore, a restaurant, and a theater.

Parents have given rave revues to Pleasant Company's products. News stories about the company usually feature an array of positive parental opinions that stress the educational aspects of the collection, the realism of its characters, the presentation of positive role models, and the overall wholesomeness of the concept which makes them worthy of their high price ($82). AG events have taken place in 46 states, with 200,000 attendants who have helped raise more than $4 million for different non-profit organizations (Phillips, 1998, p. 1C).

According to du Gay et al (1997), a product is cultural if (a) it is constituted as a meaningful object, (b) it is connected to a distinct set of social practices, (c) it is associated with certain kinds of people and places, producing—in turn—a social profile or identity, and (d) is represented through communication media. I believe that the concept and the collection of products sold by Pleasant Company comply with this definition of cultural since: (a) there are certain meanings—i.e.: educational, wholesome, "American," etc.— that seem to be associated with the AG merchandise, (b) most of the products seem to be connected with the social practices of playing, reading and collecting, (c) the merchandise is targeted specifically to girls in the United States, and (d) the dolls and related products are sold (almost exclusively) by mail catalog, a communication medium that has proven to be highly successful in the U.S (Rosenfield, 1999). In sum, AG dolls are now part of the cultural universe of young girls in this country. This, in itself, sanctions research on the subject.

The topic also presents an interesting set of gender issues. Pleasant Company was founded by a woman and its products are geared exclusively toward girls. Moreover, according to Rowland, 80 percent of her company's employees are women. "That is not by design. But I have to say, they are the only people who believed in the beginning that this could ever happen. Men just didn't understand the idea of the products, didn't think that they were necessary, couldn't understand the subtlety of the different message that we were trying to send" (Rowland as quoted in Morgenson, 1997, p. 132).

Looking at the catalogs we cannot help but notice that one of the themes is the definition of an "American girl." The dolls purport to represent time periods in American history and—in the case of Kirsten, Josefina and Addy—they also represent ethnicities. Representation has always been one of the sites of struggle for feminism. "The women's movement is not only engaged in a material struggle about equal rights and opportunities for women, but also in *a symbolic conflict about definitions of femininity*" (emphasis added, van Zoonen, 1994, p. 12). Feminist scholars have acknowledged the role the mass media play in the construction and representation of the feminine. Nevertheless, research has focused—for the most part—on adult women. There are some studies about teenage girls (Frazer, 1987; Peirce, 1990, 1993, 1995; Evans et al., 1991; McRobbie, 1991; Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Garner et al., 1998). However, the American Girl doll consumers are younger (7-12 year-olds). They are an understudied population.

This paper is part of a larger cultural study that attempts to understand the meanings associated with the AG products through textual analysis of the AG catalogs and books, and in-depth interviews of girls who own these dolls and their mothers. I place this study in a feminist cultural studies tradition, attempting to heed Alexander and Morrison's (1995) call for "the monumental task" of doing critical research on children that includes:

> [C]areful ethnographic studies that examine interpretation of texts in the context of children's culture. With a post-modern focus on intertextuality, a semiotic and structuralist microscopic examination of texts, a cultural studies foregrounding of everyday practice, and a strong underpinning of the realities of economic structure (p. 351).

This report focuses on the textual analysis of the catalogs and books. Its objective is to understand how these products represent an "American girl" identity, and how these texts affect the "available stock of meanings" (Hall, 1975, p. 12) associated with the AG paraphernalia.

I first review the scant mass communication literature concerned with girls and with catalog analyses. I then describe the theoretical grid that organizes and guides this research and its methodology. The textual analysis findings are reported followed by a brief discussion of their implications for mass communication research.

MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH FOR AND ABOUT GIRLS

There is an impressive body of research that focuses on women and almost every aspect of the mass communication spectrum, i.e.: advertising (Kervin, 1991; Lazier & Kendrick, 1993; Steinem, 1995), advertising and eating disorders (Meyers & Biocca, 1992; Harrison & Cantor, 1997), television (Deming & Jenkins, 1991; Press, 1991; Kaplan, 1992; Heide, 1995; Lee, 1995; Dow, 1996; Brundson et al., 1997), print media (Meyers, 1994; Acosta-Alzuru, 1997; Lule, 1997), public relations (Cline & Toth, 1993; Hon et al., 1993; Hon, 1995; Chen & Culbertson, 1996; Aldoory, 1998), representations of rape and violence (Meyers, 1994; Cuklanz, 1996; Comerford, 1997; Hayward, 1997), and pornography (Dines, 1995; Dworkin, 1995; Hill Collins, 1995; McDonald, 1995). Researchers have also analyzed how women consume media, looking—in particular—at film (Mulvey, 1975; Ryan, 1988; Bobo, 1995), soap operas (Barrios, 1988; Ang, 1990; Brown, 1994; Brundson, 1995; Gillespie, 1995; Martín-Barbero, 1995; Modleski, 1995; Rogers, 1995), magazines (Ferguson, 1983; McCracken, 1993; Steiner, 1995; Durham, 1996), and romance novels (Radway, 1991; Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Parameswaran, 1997).

These strands of research, however, have focused for the most part on adult women. Some scholars have looked at the interaction between teenage girls and media, paying particular attention to the study of teen magazines (Frazer, 1987; Peirce, 1990, 1993, 1995; Evans et al., 1991; McRobbie, 1991; Duffy & Gotcher, 1996; Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Garner et al., 1998) and how these "acculturate readers into consumers" (Garner et al., 1998, p. 60) while presenting images that affect their readers' assessment of themselves (Duke & Kreshel, 1998).

An examination of the literature of children and media (Lull, 1988; Bryant, 1990; Gunter & McAleer, 1990; Van Evra, 1990; Signorielli, 1991; Buckingham, 1993; Zillmann et al., 1994; Fox, 1996) also shows an almost total lack of research for and about girls.[2] There are a few notable exceptions: Chris Richard's analysis of girls' readings of television, and how these are situated in the context of the girls' social relationships (1993), Valerie Walkerdine's (1993) psychoanalytic study of one working-class family viewing the film *Annie*, and Gemma Moss' examination of twelve-year-old romance readers (1993). However, there is a clear research void regarding the study of younger girls and their interaction with the media.

CATALOG ANALYSES

The academic literature on direct mail and catalog advertising is also limited. A look at the major advertising academic journals—*Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Marketing*, and *Journal of Consumer Research*—exposes only passing mentions to and no analyses of catalogs. Barbara Stern's article in the *Journal of Advertising* (1992) is a notable exception. She includes mail catalogs, along with advertisements, commercial communications, and periodicals, as the texts of her literary analysis that explores the links between historical and personal nostalgia and consumer effects.

Journals that foster critical and cultural research publish some critical advertising research.[3] Still, articles concentrating on direct mail and catalog advertising are rare. The few published works in this area focus on two catalogs: Banana Republic and J. Peterman. Paul Smith (1988) looked at

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[2] This literature seldom mention girls. When it does, it is generally in relation to the effects of gender stereotyping on television and advertising.

[3] See the *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, in particular its special issue "Cultural Materialism," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *16*(2).

Banana Republic's chain-store and catalogs as a "post-modernist production" to which the catalogs contribute with their "multivocalism" and a "cult for authenticity:"

> To claim 'genuineness' for the Banana Republic merchandise, the catalog introduces a variety of references to historical moments in an emulsion of irony and satire, clichés and stereotypes, apocryphal histories and factoids, and so on (p. 143).

The Banana Republic catalogs have also been the focus of Elizabeth Lester's critique (1992), who argues that this text's discursive strategies, notably the "exoticizing of Others," commodifies the "Third World" and reinforces global consumption as a "First World" activity. Lester (1997) also analyzed the Nissan Pathfinder direct mail campaign, arguing that advertising's pervasiveness naturalizes its tremendous signifying power. The "most distinctive catalog" (Rosenfield, 1999, p. 35), the J. Peterman catalog, has also been the focus of Lester's textual analysis (1998), which highlights the catalogs' ideological work that perpetuates a particular geo-political status quo and becomes the ultimate "simulacrum" (Baudrillard, 1994) that connects the present to a nostalgic, mythic past.

But, it is the advertising trade press which publishes the bulk of the literature dealing with direct mail and catalogs. From advice on how to write effective copy (Nelson, 1991; Rosenfield, 1996; Vernon, 1996; Rosenfield, 1997) to descriptive statistics about the catalog business' characteristics and expected growth (Rosenfield, 1995; "Catalog business forecast," 1997; Rosenfield, 1999), publications like *Advertising Age* and *Direct Marketing* keep their readers up-to-date regarding the state of the art of the catalog business. However, no mention of the AG catalogs were found in the trade press.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND THE CIRCUIT OF CULTURE

I do not conceptualize cultural studies as a simple methodology of reading cultural texts without any political grounding. One of the central—and most fruitful—tensions in cultural studies is the one between its political and its intellectual concerns. This tension produces both the impetus for new theoretical advancements and the discomfort of traditional disciplines towards cultural studies, which stands out as an interdisciplinary approach that addresses relevant (and many times awkward) issues about culture and society (Hall, 1980^a).

Richard Johnson (1986/87) argued that the project of cultural studies is "to abstract, describe and reconstitute in concrete studies the social forms through which human beings 'live', become conscious, sustain themselves subjectively" (p. 45). In order to tackle this project, Johnson developed a model "with rich intermediate categories, more layered than the existing general theories" (p. 45) in which he depicted a circuit of the production, circulation and consumption of cultural products. The model was intended to serve, not only as a blueprint or guide for how to "do" cultural studies, but also as a demonstration that the cultural process is too complex to be explained by existing theories that are limited to the explanation of one aspect and cannot be generalized to include the other facets of the cultural process:

> What if existing theories—and the modes of research associated with them—actually express different sides of the same complex process? What if they are all true, but only as far as they go, true for those parts of the process which they have most clearly in view? What if they are all false or incomplete, liable to mislead, in that they are only partial, and therefore cannot grasp the process as a whole? (pp. 45-46).

Recently, Johnson's model has been reworked by a group of British cultural studies scholars from The Open University and used as the framework for the study of the Sony Walkman as a cultural product (du Gay et al., 1997). This circuit of culture shares some of the main principles of Johnson's model: its depiction of the cultural process as a complex and interdependent set of moments that are distinct, but not discrete, and the proposition that their individual study only gives us a partial view of how the meanings associated with a particular cultural product are produced, negotiated, and contested. It depicts five moments: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation. These moments are not presented as happening (or having to be studied) in any particular order (see Figure 1).

The circuit emphasizes the relationship between culture and meaning, which is "constructed—given, produced—through cultural practices; it is not simply 'found' in things" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 14). Meaning is transacted in each of the circuit's moments. *Representation* refers to the production of meaning through language. It "connects meaning and language to culture" (Hall, 1997[a], p. 15). This moment in the circuit highlights the symbolic underpinnings of culture. *Identity* alludes to how a particular cultural product—text, object, practice—acts as a marker that identifies a particular group. In other words, how meanings create an identity. Cultural products are also encoded with meanings in their production process. They are produced in ways that make them meaningful. These encoding processes constitute the moment of *production* in the circuit of culture. But meaning is also produced when we make use of the cultural product in our everyday life. *Consumption* looks at what the product means to those who actually use it. It involves the production of meaning through the incorporation of the product in our daily life. Finally, the circuit of culture examines the impact that a cultural product has upon the *regulation* of cultural life.

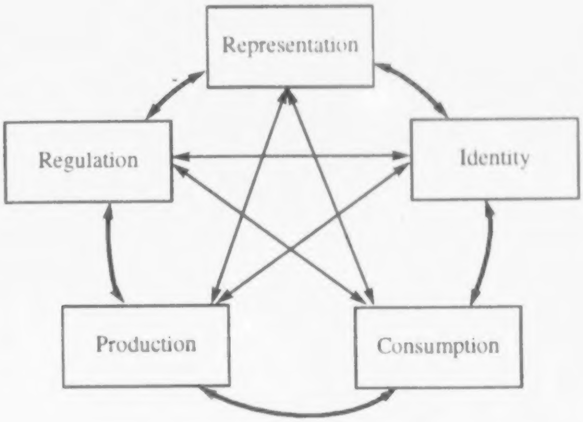

Figure 1: The Circuit of Culture
(du Gay et al., 1997, p. 1)

Cultural studies has its share of opponents and critics. I believe that the circuit of culture addresses criticism that expresses discomfort with the emphasis on textual analyses over the study of audiences (Jensen & Pauly, 1997) and annoyance at the perception that cultural studies focuses on cultural consumption rather than on cultural production (Garnham, 1997). The circuit of culture provides cultural studies with a blueprint for research that does not privilege texts over audiences or vice-versa. Nor does it assign more importance to production than consumption, or the other way around. It understands cultural analysis as the integral study of these moments. "[I]t is in a combination of processes—in their articulation—that the beginnings of an explanation can be found" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 3).

METHOD

Textual analysis recognizes a fundamental assumption of this study, i.e.: that meaning is a social production and, as such, is embedded in issues of power. Fiske (1987) argues that textual analysis acknowledges that

> [T]he distribution of power in society is paralleled by the distribution of meanings in texts, and that struggles for social power are paralleled by semiotic struggles for meanings. Every text and every reading has a social and therefore a political dimension, which is to be found partly in the structure of the text itself and partly in the relation of the reading subject to that text (p. 272).

The method is different from content analysis. Recurrence of patterns is not quantified, it is rather considered and analyzed as "pointers to latent meanings" (Hall, 1975, p. 15). Position, placement, tone and allusions are also considered in the analysis. Ultimately, the object of the analysis is not the meanings of the text, but rather the construction of those meanings through the text (Lester-Massman, 1989).

In the "Introduction" to *Paper voices: The popular press and social change, 1935-1965*, Stuart Hall (1975) explains textual analysis and its usefulness. It is important to point out that the method is as evidence-based as any quantitative textual methodology. The evidence is precisely the text. Therefore, the textual analyst should present enough textual material quoted directly to persuade readers that the evidence has been thoroughly examined and convincingly interpreted.

Textual analysis is an interpretive method. In consequence, the role of the critic/interpreter is crucial. The Frankfurt School theorists believed that criticism is a necessary vantage point from which to evaluate culture and that scholars could, therefore, "judge." Poststructuralists, on the other hand, maintain that cultural critics have no reliable ground from which to criticize. I believe that every research, criticism, "reading," takes a stand and we must acknowledge that. I also agree with Condit's argument that critical analysis should be rhetorical in the sense that it should be as local as possible, mindful of its topic and its audience (1989). Regarding our interpretations, we need to acknowledge that while we do not know all the possible understandings (meanings) that could be derived from a particular text, we can make arguments about the kinds of meanings that *can* be in the text. This in no way should be interpreted as our attempt to "tell" people which is "the" meaning of the text. As Dow (1996) argues, we look for the possibility of meaning in the text, not for its discovery or revelation.

The historical conditions of production and of consumption of the text must be considered in every textual analysis. The text is not the end in textual analysis, it is the means by which we study a signification process, a representation of reality.This process of "decentering" the text (Johnson, 1986/1987)—of studying the text as a process— is what distinguishes textual analysis from qualitative content analysis, in which the text remains at the center of the analysis. In qualitative content analysis, content is classified through open coding categories. Meaning is found solely in the text itself and not in the processes of its production and consumption. In other words, the conditions surrounding the text—other texts, historical, political, economic and cultural circumstances—are simply the context for qualitative content analysis. While in textual analysis they provide the ideological and mythic structure used to create the dominant reading.

The text analyzed in this study includes two and a half years of Pleasant Company's catalogs (Fall 1996-Winter 1999). However, all catalogs since 1995, all the books of The American Girl Collection and The American Girl Library, plus a year of American Girl magazine were also read in order to provide a more thorough "soak" and understanding of the representation process.

According to Hall (1975), the method calls for three distinctive stages: (1) A "long preliminary soak" (p. 15) in the text, which allows the analyst to focus on particular issues while preserving "the big picture." (2) Close reading of the chosen text and preliminary identification of discursive strategies and themes. (3) Interpretation of the findings within the larger framework of the study. The objective throughout was to find the catalogs' "economy of meaning" (Lidchi, 1997, p. 166). That is, how meaning is produced through language that represents these dolls and related products, and how these meanings are associated with a particular identity: American girls.

REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

> [E]ven the most mundane object can be endowed with value and thus be transformed into a vehicle of contested meaning (Lidchi, 1997, p. 155).

In the circuit of culture, the moment/site of representation looks at how language, images, and signs stand for—represent—things (objects, activities). Thus, representation is an active process in which meanings are created. "Metaphors of glass" (Glasser, 1996, p. 784) cannot explain representation. It is not a mirror-like reflection of the world through language, nor is it a window that allows us to see only a section of the world. Representation constructs meaning by connecting the world, language, and our "available stock of meanings" (Hall, 1975, p. 12). By performing these connections, representation does not reflect or frame the world, it constitutes the world. In other words, objects and activities do not have an inherent meaning, they acquire it partly through the language (words and images) used to refer to them. According to Foucault (1980), meaning is constructed through discourse, which ties knowledge to power bringing about issues related to the politics of representation.

According to the circuit of culture, representation is related to identity. At its most basic and intuitive level, identity tells us who we are and where we are placed in time and space. This could be construed as a fairly simple and static concept. In other words, identity can be seen as a fixed notion, we are who we are. But the circuit of culture tells us something different. Identities create meanings while they are produced, consumed and regulated within culture (Woodward, 1997). Issues of identity are always underpinned by the tension between essentialism and anti-essentialism. The former looks at identity as fixed, and therefore, based on nature (race, gender), or based on "an essentialist view of history" (p. 12). Non-essentialist views see identity as ever-changing, based on symbolic characteristics that attempt to differentiate in order to identify. For instance, advertising tells us how the consumption of a particular product influences our identity. Because identity is linked to representation, "identity is constructed in and through language" (Sarup, 1996, p. 47), then we must acknowledge that identity is inextricably related to issues of power, since the power to define who is included in a certain identifiable group is not equally distributed in society.

Our identities are particularly influenced by the idea of nationality. Benedict Anderson (1983) argued that the nation is an immagined community constituted by shared elements: history, myths, land (or claims to it), and culture. Today, the idea of nation is increasingly blurred. In consequence, cultural identity has become the preferred locus of analysis of scholars interested in the fluid and multiple nature of identity. Hall (1990) argues that cultural identity is always a project in the making, comprised of two kinds of ingredients: shared elements and points of difference.

Identity then, is not fixed. It is socially and symbolically constituted. It involves "symbolic marking" (Woodward, 1997, p. 12) that denotates difference and, at the same time, emphasizes shared characteristics. Identity is always linked to power and representation. Stereotyping and advertising are conspicuous representational practices that work through difference and identification, and that show the links between representation and identity.

The following sections look at how the AG catalogs and books represent Pleasant Company's products. Since this merchandise is advertised almost exclusively through catalogs, these constitute the main site for the study of representation. Although I read AG catalogs dating back to the Spring of 1995, in this study I focus on the catalogs published from Fall of 1996 to Winter of 1999. I preface the analysis with a description of the catalogs and books. This is followed by the study of how Pleasant Company represents itself and its audience in these catalogs and how these representations render an extra-ordinary image of their products that separates them from similar merchandise found in stores. The analysis continues with the examination of how the AG dolls (and related products) are presented in the catalogs, focusing on the visual and verbal languages that depict these products and how they construct an American past and depict an American present that convey a version of American girlhood, in particular, and of the United States, in general. In doing so, the catalogs also construct an American girl identity with empowering features.

In order to present the textual evidence as smoothly and clearly as possible, I will not refer to AG catalogs and books using the APA standards. Instead, I will use the following conventions: for catalogs, (season year, page number), e.g.: (Spring 1996, p. 1); for books, (*Title*, page number), e.g.: (*Meet Felicity*, p. 3). Text appearing unchanged in every issue of the catalog will not have a reference.

AG Catalogs

These catalogs are sleek, 9 $^{1/4"}$ x 11 $^{1/2"}$, publications[4] printed on glossy paper in which the use of photographs, art, color, and typographical devices efficiently project the content, eliciting a feeling of elegance and rendering a pleasant reading and/or browsing experience. The catalogs arrive, roughly, at a monthly rate. Instead of a date, month/year, the catalogs are identified by season and year, e.g.: Spring 96, Holiday 97, etc. There is no clear pattern in the catalog's publication rates since there have been seasons without catalogs and seasons with multiple catalogs. The number of catalogs usually peaks in the Spring and Holiday seasons.

All front covers feature a headline and one or two teasers that refer to new products. These are placed on top of the bleed photograph. The headline, "Pleasant Company for American girls!" was recently changed to "American Girl" (Holiday 1998 catalogs).[5] We can classify the covers into three types, according to the photo they display. First, covers that show a girl reading one of the books accompanied by a doll. In these pictures the girl usually resembles the doll. Both of them wear matching outfits which, in turn, match the cover of the book being read by the girl. For example, a brunette girl has Samantha sitting in her lap as if both are reading the book *Samantha's Surprise* (Samantha's Christmas story). Both girl and doll wear the same hairstyle and the "cranberry party dress" which is Samantha's Christmas outfit (Holiday[a] 1997).[6] The second type of covers features one doll and several of her accessories set in a background reminiscent of one of the stories, e.g.: Kirsten, dressed in her winter outfit and waving at us, stands inside her family's cabin in front of a window where snow has accumulated and through which a glimpse of a winter landscape can be seen.To her right is her "trestle table and chairs." Dishes, some berries and Kirsten's "Saint Lucia tray" sit on the table (Holiday^{a} 1996). The third type of covers depict several dolls, usually AG of Today dolls, in a "realistic" situation. For instance, the fall 1998 catalog had three AG of Today wearing Halloween outfits. The dolls seem to be trick-or-treating since they are holding candy-filled halloween baskets. In the dark background, the shapes of houses—with lighted windows—can be seen in the distance (Fall 1998).

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[4] Until 1995, the catalogs were larger in size, 10"x 12".

[5] One of the few noticeable changes in the catalogs since Mattel's acquisition of Pleasant Company.

[6] This type of photograph is frequent in the catalogs. Even catalogs that do not feature girls in their covers, will include this type of picture inside, showing girls and dolls that resemble each other in their physiques and outfits, reading in a pleasant, peaceful setting. It is an effective way of establishing the identification girl/AG doll and the connection girl/AG doll/book. At the same time, it is a rather idealized image of girlhood, one that is a stark contrast with the hectic, frantic characteristics that we associate with contemporary life.

The inside of the front cover and the first page of the catalog always form a double-page spread in which the left side has a photograph that includes some of the elements portrayed in the front cover. For instance, the double-page spread of the above-mentioned catalog depicting Kirsten in its cover (Holiday^{a} 1996), features a girl, dressed like Kirsten, playing with the doll in this setup. This photo presents a different, less close, perspective, therefore, we can see that the background is one of Kirsten's "Scenes & Settings."[7] On the floor lies a copy of *Changes for Kirsten* (her winter story). The background of the setting is a Christmas tree. The front cover—with its smiling, waving Kirsten—gives us the impression that Kirsten is alive. When we turn the page, we realize that it is also the setting of a girl's game. In this way, the inside picture intensifies the message from the front cover. This is a visual tactic repeated in every AG catalog.

The right side of the double-page spread has a message signed by Pleasant T. Rowland. Its content changes from time to time. Back in 1996 the message described the line of historical dolls in broad terms and delineated the company's mission. Currently, the message is prefaced by the phrase "[a]n important message to parents," which unmistakably declares its intended audience, and promotes specific products or events:

> [W]ith the opening of American Girl Place in Chicago, we've created a destination to dream of—three floors filled with all of the things girls love. There, your American girl can discover the magic of live theater at a performance of *The American Girls Revue*, enjoy fun and fancy dining at the elegant Cafe, shop for books, dolls, dresses, and other delights at the boutiques, and get her picture on the cover of a souvenir issue of American Girl magazine (Winter 1999, p. 1).

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[7] These are sets of 58"x 24" background scenes depicting each doll/character's bedroom, kitchen, school, etc.

This page also contains a table of contents, which uses logos and page numbers as pointers to the regular sections of the catalog: The American Girl Collection, American Girl of Today, and Bitty Baby. The American Girl Collection, the line of six historical dolls/characters, is the first regular section of the catalog. All the section's pages are trimmed in burgundy, which also colors the headlines and sub-heads. Its logo features the faces of the six historical dolls placed in historical chronological order. Each face is inside a burgundy medallion, connoting ideas like "tradition" and "antique." The medallions are placed on top of a burgundy-trimmed block containing the words, "The American Girl Collection."

The section begins with a double-page spread that includes small-sized renderings of the six characters with their respective name, year and description, e.g.: "Molly 1944 A lovable schemer and dreamer." These six images surround the main text which describes the collection and its purpose. The two pages also include small photographs of the six boxed sets of books, and a large photograph depicting either an historical doll, or a girl reading with her doll.

Each historical doll/character has its own sub-section with identical layouts. These sub-sections are presented in historical order: Felicity, Josefina, Kirsten, Addy, Samantha and Molly. Each starts with a vertical double-page spread that displays a picture of an actual-size doll (18"), wearing an outfit and accessories that match the cover of her *Meet*______ book, which is also shown in the page accompanied by an abstract that hints, but does not give away, the book's plot. Copy specifies the product's features (including the doll) and situates it in a particular historical period:

> Felicity comes dressed in a flower-striped ***gown*** edged in ruffles. Underpants were not worn in 1774, but under the gown there is a simple ***shift***. She wears white wool ***stockings*** and black ***shoes*** with fancy buckles.
> Her shoes are "single-lasted," which means they are just alike and will fit on either foot. In colonial times people switched their shoes from one foot to the other so they would wear evenly! (emphasis in the original).

Throughout the catalog, emphasized text, in boldfaced italics, highlights the names of the articles promoted. In this case, Felicity comes with a gown, shift, stockings and shoes. Her first book, *Meet Felicity*, is also part of the package (doll and hardcover *Meet* ________ book, $88; doll and paperback book, $82). Her accessories ($20) are sold separately.

Pages displaying and describing each of the doll/character's books, along with the accessories and outfits pertaining to each story, follow the vertical spread. School, Christmas, birthday, summer, and winter stories are presented in this fashion. The photographs show the doll, wearing an outfit that matches the book's front cover and her accessories, i.e.: desks, tables, chairs, silverware, books, etc. The copy describes each item linking them to the story. It also groups the items under a subhead and informs us of its order code and price:

Picnic lunch

> When Josefina went to pick herbs and berries for making wool dyes, she packed a hearty picnic lunch. Fill the pottery ***canteen*** with water, and load the checked wool ***bag*** with a homegrown feast: a bright ***cloth*** to spread on the ground, two corn ***tortillas***, a yellow ***squash***, a bunch of ***onions***, fresh ***goat cheese***, and a plump, ripe ***plum***. Yum! ***JSAL $18*** (emphasis in the original).

Each of the dolls/characters' sub-sections ends with a double-page spread with the headline, "_________'s Treasures & Collections" showing the doll's bed ($40-$98), bedside table ($25-$38), "nighttime necessities" ($18-$20) extra outfits that do not match any of the stories ($16-$24), nightgown ($18-$20), extra shoes, socks and ribbons, and furniture to store her outfits (Felicity's "clothes press," Josefina's "chest," Kirsten's, Addy's, Samantha's and Molly's different versions of a "trunk," $150-$175). The catalog labels all these accessories and furniture as "historically accurate reproductions appropriate for children 8 and over."

The American Girls Collection section ends with a variable number of pages (two to ten) that advertise diverse articles such as doll dress patterns, stationery sets, postcards, hair-care and skin-care kits, a CD-ROM and "Scenes & Settings. These pages also feature girls' outfits that match the dolls':

> Afternoon Tea Dress
>
> Dressed in pleats and plaid, Samantha always looked prim and proper for her afternoon tea with Grandmary. You'll look perfect, too, in this pretty cotton dress checked in rose and gray with burgundy and white trim at the collar and cuffs. A heart locket of antiqued brass hangs from the bow. Imported. ***SM600 $80*** (emphasis in the original).

The next section in the catalog is devoted to the American Girl of Today.[8] These pages, trimmed in purple, feature headlines, sub-heads and emphasized text in a variety of bright colored sans serif type which gives the pages a sparkling, modern image that contrasts with the traditional burgundy and black roman type of the historical collection section. The logo also contrasts with the one representing the historical collection. It is a dynamic, multicolored shape of a girl placed on a black background. Whereas the AG Collection's logo showed the faces and established the chronological order of the six historical dolls, this logo is simply a colorful, modern, non-descript ageless, raceless shape with no distinctive features which signifies that any girl is an AG of Today.

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[8] The AG of Today has recently been re-named AG Today (Holiday^a 1998).

This part of the catalog is organized in a similar fashion as the American Girl Collection section. It also begins with a vertical double-page spread that displays an actual-size doll wearing an outfit and accessories which are sold separately. These dolls ($82) come with a 56-page special issue of AG magazine, a blank book to write her own unique story," a writer's guide, and a stencil "for fancy lettering." The next two pages display 20 possible faces in which the AG of Today can be ordered. These represent different combinations of skin, eye, and hair color. There are also different shapes of eye, nose, and mouth.

Even though the AG of Today do not have books, their section in the catalog is organized similarly to the historical collection. Outfits and accessories are presented in separate pages for school (cheerleading, soccer and girl scouts are also featured), the holidays (includes Kwanzaa, Hanukkah and Chinese New Year, as well as Christmas), birthday (a cookout with burgers and chips), summer (featuring horseback riding, swimming and camping), and winter (skating, sledding, skiing, and even cast and crutches for the injured). The products' descriptions are rich in contemporary images:

> School Lunch
>
> No need to pack a sack for your American Girl—it's hot-lunch day. Load her *tray* with a slice of *pizza*, a garden *salad*, half a *banana*, a carton of *milk*, and a peanut butter *cookie*. Don't forget the *napkin*, *straw*, and "*spork*"! ***GSAL $12***
>
> Computer Desk & Chair
>
> Set your American Girl's computer on this sturdy *desk* so she can do her homework. There's even a pencil tray built right in. A *chair* with a soft swivel seat and comfy backrest is the perfect place to sit and surf the Net. ***GSF $40*** (italicized words appear in boldfaced, colored sans-serif type in the original).

"Slumber Party Fun!" is AG of Today's equivalent to the historical collection's "Treasures & Collections" pages. It portrays a slumber party scene in which four AG of Today dolls wearing different styles of sleepwear are surrounded by a bunk bed ($68), nightstand ($32), sleeping bag ($18), and a school locker to store the outfits ($110). The AG of Today section ends with several pages that display merchandise for girls, matching outfits and contemporary accessories like sleeping bags ($50), backpacks ($35), and slumber party kits. These pages also advertise the AG Library books ($4.95-$9.95) and AG magazine subscriptions ($19.95 for one year, 6 issues).

The Bitty Baby collection constitutes the third regular section of the catalogs. Shorter (6 pages) than the two previous sections, its pages are trimmed in red, which is also the color of the headlines and subheads. This collection enables younger girls to start assimilating the idea of ethnically-diverse dolls with related books and merchandise.

In addition to the three regular sections, some AG catalogs have AG Gear sections displaying clothes for girls. The section, organized by type of clothing, e.g.: "All decked out in denim" featured denim jumpers, skirts, pants and jackets (Holiday[c] 1998, pp. 98-99), features copy that is a straightforward description of the clothes, "printed tee in ***teal*** or ***midnight blue***. Stretch poly velour. Imported. ***S, M, L, XL***. RXTS $28" (p. 106). However, through headlines and photographs, the pages come across as vibrant and contemporary. The girls who model these outfits are from diverse ethnic backgrounds and wear broad smiles while they, seemingly, participate in activities such as trimming a Christmas tree with a popcorn garland (pp. 102-103) or washing their pet dog(Spring[b] 1998, pp. 78-79).

AG Books

The American Girls Collection

Pleasant Company Publications publishes two lines of books, the American Girls Collection and the American Girl Library. The first collection is organized by doll/character. Each one has six books, a family story, *Meet* ________, a school story, ________ *Learns a Lesson*, a Christmas story, ________*'s Surprise*, a birthday (spring) story, *Happy Birthday* ________*!*, a summer story, ________ *Saves the Day*, and a winter story, *Changes for* ________. These 60- to 70-pages books can be acquired in paperback ($5.95) or hardcover ($12.95) versions through the catalog or in bookstores.

All the books look the same. Their covers feature an artist's rendition of the character placed on top of a rule whose color identifies each character (green for Felicity, red for Josefina, sepia for Kirsten, orange for Addy, burgundy for Samantha, blue for Molly). The book's title is always below this rule accompanied by the type of story, its place in the character's book sequence and the year in which the story takes place.

Each story is told in four to five chapters sprinkled with small and large color illustrations. The storylines are entertaining and easy to follow. Each one presents a conflict that is solved at the end of the book. For example, in *Kirsten Learns a Lesson*, Kirsten—a Swedish immigrant—faces the situation of going to an American school without speaking English very well. By the end of the story, Kirsten's English has improved and she has earned the friendship of her schoolmates. But each character's series of six books also presents a larger overarching conflict that underpins the six plots and is only resolved in the last book. For instance, Samantha is an orphan without siblings being raised by her wealthy grandmother. Her lack of a family is the overarching conflict, which is solved in *Changes for Samantha* when her favorite aunt, Cornelia, marries and adopts her and her friend Nellie—who is also an orphan and poor—along with Nellie's two sisters. The book ends with Samantha saying "*I'm* the luckiest person in the world. At last, at last, I have a real family of my own!" (emphasis in the original, *Changes for Samantha*, p. 60).

The dolls/characters are consistently portrayed as resourceful, good-hearted girls who learn from their mistakes. The plots set the girls' everyday life against a historical background which is linked to the story. In *Molly Learns a Lesson*, Molly's teacher organizes a "lend-a-hand" contest to help the war effort. In *Felicity Learns a Lesson*, Felicity's father, who owns a store, refuses to sell or drink tea in protest to the king's tax on tea. In *Happy Birthday, Samantha!*, she accidentally finds out that her aunt Cornelia is a suffragist. In short, the books are historical fiction.

Each book's story is followed by the section "A Peek into the Past," a supplement to the book's plot, that provides background information about the U.S. in the year in which the main story takes place. "A Peek..." 's topic matches the story's topic:

Meet Samantha	America in 1904

Samantha Learns a Lesson	School in 1904
Samantha's Surprise	Christmas in 1904
Happy Birthday Samantha!	Growing up in 1904
Samantha Saves the Day	America Outdoors in 1904
Changes for Samantha	Changes for America

By constantly relating to the character, "A Peek..." describes in broad strokes how life was in the United States in the character's time. The section is peppered with photographs and images that illustrate the text's content. For example, under an old sepia photo of a family riding an antique car, the text reads:

> Wherever turn-of-the-century Americans looked, they saw a changing world. Automobiles were taking the place of horses even on country roads. By the time Samantha was nineteen years old, the Ford Motor Company had built over a million cars—all of them black! (*Changes for Samantha*, p. 62).

All books have a detachable page that holds a picture of the six dolls over text that invites the reader to read more books, which are "only the beginning. Our lovable dolls and their beautiful clothes and accessories make the stories in The American Girls Collection come alive." There is also a detachable, no-postage-necessary, post card to request AG catalogs.

It is important to mention that there are two versions of Josefina's books: English and Spanish. The English books have Spanish words in the text, which are translated in a "Glossary of Spanish Words" at the end of each book. The glossary also includes easy-to-follow pronunciation instructions, e.g.: "gracias (GRAH-see-ahs)—thank you" (*Happy Birthday Josefina!*, p. 68). Her books contain a "Meet the advisory board" list with the names and titles of the people who "authenticated Josefina's stories." The list includes history and Spanish professors, curators, librarians, historians and archive directors, most of them with hispanic names. In the Spanish version of *Meet Josefina, Así es Josefina*, the title of "A Peek into the Past" is "Nuevo Mexico en 1824" [New Mexico in 1824] (p. 78), whereas the English version is titled "America in 1824." Furthermore, although both version's contents are identical, the Spanish books uses the term "Estados Unidos" [United States] instead of "America" which is the word used in the English version, an acknowledgment of the convention among most Spanish speakers that "America" refers to the entire American continent constituted by North, Central and South America.

Even though these 36 books constitute the heart of the American Girl Collection, craftbooks, cookbooks and theater kits also published by doll/character, supplement the novels. There are also five Teacher's Guides,[9] which are the only products in the entire Pleasant Company collection that are addressed to girls *and* boys. The guides use each character's book sequence as the basis for language arts and social studies lessons and activities. They provide teachers with contextual information about each time period, summaries of the books' plots, ideas for "hands-on history," a map of the character's "world," and a bibliography for each historical period.

The American Girl Collection of books is an uniform, well-programmed line of books, in which attention has been paid to detail and to producing books that provide,both entertainment and a selling vehicle for Pleasant Company's dolls and products.

American Girl Library

This line of books ($3.95-$9.95) is not as programmed and patterned as the AG Collection. The books are not numbered, nor do they seem to follow a sequence. Their presentation is colorful, modern and diverse since they have different sizes and shapes. Their topics are varied, but they could all be classified under the umbrella of "advice" or "help" books: *Groom your room: Terrific Touches to Brighten Your Bedroom, Oops! The Manners Guide for Girls, The Care and Keeping of Friends, Great Girl Food.* Many of the books feature material from the AG magazine that has been collected over the years:

> *Here's How*
>
> Inspired by a popular feature in American Girl magazine, these are the tips and tricks you can't find anywhere else! ***AGLE $5.95*** (emphasis in the original, Winter 98, p. 79).

These books are even easier to read than the AG Collection. They are profusely illustrated with drawings, not photographs, which include girls in all sizes, shapes and colors. Many of the books also double as activity books:

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[9] At the time of this writing, Josefina's Teacher's Guide had not been published.

> *Birthday Cards For Girls to Make*
>
> Twelve clever cards to cut out, color, and decorate with glamorous, glittery trimmings that are all included. ***AGLB $9.95*** (emphasis in the original,Winter 98, p. 79).

The books tackle many aspects of a girl's life, from *Super Slumber Parties* to a secret diary that is also a scrapbook, *Pages and Pockets.*The collection, like the rest of Pleasant Company's products, makes no qualms about the fact that they target girls and that its objective is to help them, *Bright Ideas from Girls, for Girls*. The latest book in the collection, *The Care and Keeping of You*, is potentially its most daring and controversial. Profusely illustrated with drawings that depict girls in all shapes and from different ethnic backgrounds, the book shies away from discussing sex, but explores subjects like the care of dental braces, acne, deodorants, shaving, how to buy a bra , shaving, eating disorders and menstruation:

> Too big? Too small? No matter how they're built many girls feel their breasts just aren't right. And that's plain wrong! (p. 50).
>
> Lots of people worry about their weight and wish they could be thinner, but when a girl becomes so focused on losing weight that she stops eating normally, she may have an eating disorder. Living with this kind of illness can be very hard. A girl's fierce desire to be thin can quickly spiral into dangerous habits and behavior that she can't control. No matter how thin she becomes, she looks in the mirror and sees a fat girl. Without help, she can become very sick. She can do permanent damage to her body, or even die. There are two main eating disorders: *anorexia* (an-uh-REX-ee-uh) and *bulimia* (buh-LEE-mee-uh) (emphasis in the original, p. 62).
>
> *Getting your period.* There are probably no other words that will make you feel as excited, scared, or just plain confused. [...] At first, the idea of getting periods may seem, well—*gross*. But periods are a sign that your body is healthy and working properly (emphasis in the original, p. 70).

I found this book especially helpful for girls. Its conversational style and colorful presentation optimizes the delivery of the information it contains.

"Pleasant Company" and "You"

Pleasant T. Rowland's message in each catalog spells out her company's mission "to provide girls with beautiful books, dolls, and pastimes that celebrate the experience of growing up as an American girl" (Fall^{a} 1996, p. 1). Although Pleasant Company is represented through the entire catalog. Rowland's message is a good starting point for the analysis of how the text represents her company. These messages are signed by Rowland signalling, in this way, a personal one-to-one tone in her communication with readers. Her signature is accompanied by the caption:

> Pleasant Rowland, founder and president of Pleasant Company is a noted educator and author of children's reading and language arts materials used in schools throughout the nation (Winter 1998, p. 1).[10]

Her authority as an educator is established and used as both framework and justification for the creation of the products:

> As an educator, I wanted to give girls an understanding of America's past and a sense of pride in the traditions they share with girls of yesterday. Out of this desire, The American Girls Collection was born (Winter 1998, p. 1).

In this way, her authority (and the company's) are established and their connection to education is highlighted, leading to the conclusion that these products are somehow instructional. This is confirmed in later catalogs where Ms. Rowland squarely positions her products as educational. "[a]t American Girl, creating quality products that *educate* and entertain lies at the very heart of our mission" (emphasis added, Winter 1999, p. 1).

But Pleasant Company is tied not only to education, it is linked to "you." The catalogs direct their message to "you," a reader also constructed through the text, an "American girl:"

> At Pleasant Company, we think being an *American girl* is great—something to stand up and shout about. Something to celebrate! On each and every page of this catalogue, *you*'ll see it's true. Everything we do is a celebration of *you*!" (emphasis added, Fall^{a} 1996, p. 1).

> The American Girls Collection is for *you* if *you* love to curl up with a good book. It's for *you* if *you* like to play with dolls and act out stories. [...] Meet Felicity, Josefina, Kirsten, Addy, Samantha, and Molly, six lively *American girls* who lived long ago. [...] *You*'ll see that some things in their lives were very different from *yours*. But others, like families, friendships, and feelings, haven't changed through they years. These are the important things that *American girls* will always share (emphasis added, Holiday^{b} 1997, p. 1).

> *You*'re the inspiration for a whole new line—a collection of simply great stuff that celebrates who *you* are today, and what *you* love to do. In fact, it's even named after *you—American Girl!* (emphasis added, Fall^{a} 1996, p. 66).

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10. In another post-Mattel change, the caption now reads "Pleasant Rowland, founder and CEO of Pleasant Company and creator of American Girl" (Holiday^{a} 1998, p. 1).

Using a simple model of communication, we observe that a communication process is established between Pleasant Company, the source, and "you=American girl," the receiver. The communication channel—the catalog—presents its message, selling AG products, always in reference to the receiver:"[y]our ***Felicity doll*** has snappy green eyes that open and close" (emphasis in the original , Holiday^{b} 1997, p. 2), "[h]elp Josefina get ready for bed with her blue-and-white Puebla ***basin*** and cotton ***towel***" (emphasis in the original, p. 13).

The catalogs establish a special relationship between "you=American girl" and Pleasant Company, which becomes "we" in the text. According to the catalogs, this company listens to girls and is responsive to their needs:

> [...]letters urged us to expand our vision from the past to the present [...]. *Our response* is an entirely new collection—The American Girl of Today (emphasis added, Fall^{a} 1996, p. 1).
>
> Then girls told us they wanted us to help them address the challenges of growing up in the 90s. The American Girl of Today line [...] was *our answer*. (emphasis added, Fall^{b} 1997, p. 1).
>
> Lately, girls have been telling us they're bored with their well-worn jeans and baggy sweatshirts. [...] *We heard* their message loud and clear! *Our response*? A great new batch of American Girl Gear for back-to-school (emphasis added, Fall^{b} 1997, p. 1).
>
> For more than a decade, we've been the company that American girls trust. When they speak, *we listen*, because we believe that what they say is important (emphasis added, Fall^{b} 1997, p. 1).

In this way, Pleasant Company represents its relationship to its clients—American girls—as unique. The company privileges itself as the repository of the girls' trust, suggesting that not everybody assigns importance to what girls have to say. Even product development is portrayed as a response to girls' needs instead of as a profit-seeking activity. The relationship is unique precisely because Pleasant Company continually, and even overtly, tells its readers what constitutes an American girl.

In sum, the catalogs construct a relationship between Pleasant Company and its intended audience, American girls. In doing so, the text depicts Pleasant Company as an educational/entertainment organization that is particularly sensitive and sympathetic to its audience's needs. The latter take preeminence and become the ostensible motivation for Pleasant Company's actions rendering an image of a company (and products) that are not ordinary, "It's for you if you want to collect something so special that you'll treasure it for years to come" (p. 2).

Constructing American Girls

> Is it possible to confirm ethnic or national identity without claiming a recoverable history which supports a fixed identity? (Woodward, 1997, p. 13).

Reconstructing the Past: The Historical Collection

Through the catalogs and books, the AG Collection is portrayed as a line of dolls representing characters that lived in the past, "[m]eet Felicity, Josefina, Kirsten, Addy, Samantha, and Molly, six lively American girls who lived long ago" (Fall[a] 1996, p. 3). Their books, outfits and accessories, "replicas of real things found in times gone by" (Summer 1995, back cover), contribute to the signifying process through which these dolls become characters and are represented as historical. Inevitably, however, representation also works at a second level. Since the dolls/characters are presented as historical, then they—*themselves*— represent, through personification, the American past. In other words, the AG Collection reconstructs the past in a particular way, rendering in the process a version of American history (and American identity). This process is explored by focusing on the catalogs, the books, and the products they attempt to sell.

In every catalog and book, each doll/character has a year and a phrase associated to them. These phrases are short descriptions, which give a first representation of the dolls:

Felicity	1774	A spunky, spritely colonial girl
Josefina	1824	An Hispanic girl of heart and hope
Kirsten	1854	A pioneer girl of strength and spirit
Addy	1864	A courageous girl of the Civil War
Samantha	1904	A bright Victorian beauty
Molly	1944	A lovable schemer and dreamer

These phrases explicitly associate a historical period to Felicity, Kirsten, Addy, and Samantha. Adults who read these will probably realize that Molly's year is the last of WWII. Josefina's year and short description are the only ones that lack a historical reference. On the other hand, only Josefina's description contains a reference to the doll/character's ethnicity. Samantha's description is also unique. It is the only one that mentions physical attributes, she is a "beauty." All the dolls/characters have some personality traits associated to them: "spunky, spritely," "heart and hope," "strength and spirit," "courageous," "bright," and "lovable".

The dolls highlight specific years of significance to U.S. history. The Civil War and WWII are part of the American past as represented by Pleasant Company. WWI, the Korean, Vietnam, and Cold wars are not. In this way, the assignment of a particular year/historical period to each doll automatically places that period under the spotlight and makes it part of these products' representation of the American past.

Through the catalogs' and books' text, the dolls/characters (with the exception of Josefina) are made to represent each historical period by presenting them as the personification of the United States in each of these eras. In this way, dolls/characters and country are portrayed as mirror images of each other.

Felicity, who continuously rebels against the colonial social norms imposed on her, is explicitly associated with the colonies' struggle for independence. "Felicity's strong-willed struggle for independence matches America's own feisty fight for freedom at the time of the American Revolution" (Spring[a] 1998, p. 4). The parallelisms between Felicity and the colonies are persistent throughout her stories. For instance, in *Happy Birthday, Felicity!* she disobeys her parents at the same time that the colonists begin to disobey the king. In her last book, Felicity acquires more independence and realizes, like the colonies, that independence is always accompanied by the necessity of self-governance (*Changes for Felicity*).

Addy and her family are slaves in the south during the Civil War. She and her mother escape to Philadelphia where her stories take place. The rest of her immediate family (father, brother, and baby sister) stay behind. This is the setup of Addy's books' overarching conflict, the separation of her family and the tradeoffs involved between being free in the north and not having her family together. The catalogs and books explicitly make the parallel between Addy and the United States (which is also separated into North and South). "Addy—and America—learn the importance of freedom"

(Spring[a] 1998, p. 30). In the end, the war over, her family reunited as do the North and the South again constituting the United States (*Changes for Addy*).

Samantha represents the contrast and conflicts of America in the new century, "a time of frills and finery, when America was popping with newfangled notions" (Fall[a] 1996, p. 34). The contrasts are between her, a wealthy orphan, and her best friend Nellie, a poor servant girl. Through Nellie, Samantha learns about the orphan train and the difficult conditions in which poor children lived, working long hours at unsafe factories and not being able to go to school. Samantha's books depict the stark contrasts between the social classes of early 1900s America. Her books are also about the conflicts between the prevalent ideas of her time, epitomized by her grandmother, and "newfangled notions" that struggle for recognition and acceptance, personified by her Aunt Cornelia:

> "I could earn money to buy her [a new doll], Grandmary. I could make boomerangs and sell them. *The Boys' Handy Book* shows just how to do it. I could—"
>
> "Samantha!" Grandmary was shocked. "A *lady* does not earn money."
>
> Samantha had known there wasn't much hope, but she added very quietly, "Cornelia says a woman should be able to earn money. She says women shouldn't have to depend on men for everything. She says—"
>
> "Cornelia has a great many newfangled notions," announced Grandmary. "She should keep them to herself" (emphasis in the original, *Meet Samantha*, pp. 14-15).

Molly, whose father is a medical doctor on service in Europe and whose mother works for the Red Cross, represents the United States' "homefront" during WWII, "when America was hardworking and hopeful, patriotic and proud". (Spring[a] 1998, p. 50). Like the country, Molly struggles with scarcity and sacrifice to help the war effort. Like the 1940s United States, Molly faces the changes and challenges brought about by the redefinition of gender roles during the war:

> Before Dad left, before the war, Molly's family never ate supper in the kitchen. They ate dinner in the dining room. Before Dad left, back before the war, the whole family always had dinner together. They laughed and talked the whole time. Now things were different. Dad was gone, and every morning Molly's mother went off to work at the Red Cross headquarters. Very often she got home too late to have dinner with the family" (*Meet Molly*, pp. 5-6).

Kirsten was born in Sweden and moved to the American mid-west when she was nine years old (1854). She represents the immigrants and the gratifications and difficulties of the melting pot. Her overarching conflict is whether she will adapt to life in the United States. This conflict is directly stated in the catalogs' description of her first book which ends with the question "will she ever feel at home like a real American girl?" (p. 20), an interesting question that suggests that immigrants are not "real American." Kirsten's outfits and accessories artfully mix her Swedish roots with the American style, rendering a visual representation of the melting pot:

> Kirsten comes in a blue calico dress—her first real American dress. [...]She wears the red and white apron she brought from Sweden (p. 20).
>
> Pack a lunch for Kirsten in this charming oval wooden box. In Sweden, it's called a "tine" (tee-na). [...] Pioneer food was simple but hearty. For lunch, give Kirsten a piece of bread, a sausage, a wedge of cheese, and a juicy wild apple" (p. 22).
>
> In Sweden, on the darkest day of the year, the oldest daughter dresses up as the Saint Lucia girl. [...] Your Kirsten doll can wear her long white gown trimmed with a bright red sash (p. 23).
>
> For Kirsten's first American birthday she wore a summery dress checked in apple blossom pink and covered with a crisp white apron (p. 24).

By the end of her last book, Kirsten has succeeded in adapting to her new country and her family is even able to build a new house, a direct affirmative answer to the question posited in her first book, i.e.: she feels at home in America because she literally has a home.

On the other hand, Josefina's 1824 world, as represented in her stories, outfits and accessories, is purely New Mexican. There is no attempt to present her as part of the melting pot. Even though she is labeled as "hispanic," Josefina looks and dresses like the women we see in re-runs of the *Zorro* television series. Her books, outfits and accessories may be historically accurate, but it is misleading to represent her as hispanic, which is a word of relatively recent usage that is commonly associated with people of Latin American origin.[11] In this case, the word hispanic is associated with Mexican outfits and accessories that do not accurately represent the variety (and ambiguity) included in the term. Unlike Kirsten's, Josefina's outfits and accessories do not mix and blend her New Mexican heritage with American style and objects:

> New Mexican winters could be very cold, when the sharp winds blew down form the mountains. Slip Josefina's ***sarape*** (sah-RAH-peh) over her head so she'll stay toasty and warm. Its distinctive design is similar to the highly valued Saltillo sarapes of Josefina's day (emphasis in the original, Holiday[a] 1998, p. 21).

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[11] Hispanic is a problematic term. For instance, it connotes people who speak Spanish. Then, is a Brazilian a Hispanic? Is a person from Spain a Hispanic? What is the difference between the terms "Hispanic" and "Latina(o)"? Furthermore, how does a "Hispanic" look?

> Tia Dolores brought books and writing supplies from Mexico City—a ***speller*** called a silabario, a ***ledger***, a ***quill pen***, a glass ***inkwell***—and gave Josefina lessons. You can help Josefina read the cuaderno, a leather ***notebook*** filled with poems, proverbs, songs [...] (emphasis in the original, p. 16).
>
> Josefina loved the cheerful bustle of the cocina, the kitchen. Help her grind corn with the ***mano*** and ***metate***, or grinding stones [...]The ***chiles*** in the coiled ***basket*** and the ***stick*** strung with dried ***squash***, ***garlic***, and ***corn*** will make a tasty meal (emphasis in the original, p. 21).

Neither the books, nor the catalogs establish parallels between Josefina and the United States. She never personifies the country. Her stories, centered around the loss of her mother,[12] develop against the background of 1824 New Mexico (which was part of Mexico until the 1848 signature of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, yielding Texas, New Mexico and California to the United States). References to the "americanos" only appear in her last two books, when American traders come to Santa Fe with their wagons filled with American goods to be traded for New Mexican handwoven blankets and Spanish gold coins. In *Josefina Saves the Day*, an American trader gets acquainted with Josefina's family. But trust for the americanos does not come naturally for these New Mexicans. When it seems that the trader has betrayed them, Josefina's grandmother says:

> "I knew it was a mistake to trust that americano!" said Abuelita. "he used his jokes and flattery and music to trick us into liking him! We didn't really know him at all!" She turned to Papá. "If you go to town right now, perhaps you can find your mules and get them back," she said (*Josefina Saves the Day*, p. 45).

In the end, the American trader has not betrayed the Montoyas. However, the mistrust between two cultures, that are accurately presented as different, is patent. Josefina's books end twenty years before New Mexico became part of the U.S. And, even though her stories only hint the intercultural conflicts awaiting New Mexico, "A Peek into the Past" of her last book describes them in more detail:

> Even though Americans were happy to do business with New Mexicans, many of them looked down on Mexican people or made fun of New Mexican customs they did not understand (*Changes for Josefina*, p. 61-62).
>
> [S]ome Americans simply took advantage of New Mexicans who did not speak English and tricked them out of their property (p. 65).

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[12] In Josefina's first book, her mother has recently passed away. Through the six books, Josefina struggles, but eventually learns, to live without her beloved Mamá. Her aunt, Tia Dolores, becomes a maternal figure for Josefina and her sisters. In the end, Dolores marries Josefina's father, solving—in this way—Josefina's overarching conflict.

> Americans were not willing to grant statehood to New Mexico for many years. One reason was prejudice against people of Spanish and Mexican heritage. Many Americans thought that New Mexicans seemed too foreign to be "real" Americans (p. 66).

This seems to be precisely the problem with Josefina, whose looks, dress and costumes seem too foreign to be considered a "real" American girl.[13] While the other five dolls/characters personify U.S. facets or stages in its history, Josefina personifies a different culture. In this sense, even though her collection (like the rest of the dolls) is supported by historical research, she fails to represent hispanics as a true ingredient of the melting pot.

In sum, the American Girl Collection uses historical fiction, beautiful dolls, and historically-accurate outfits and accessories to construct a romanticized version of American history that underscores particular periods: colonial (Felicity), pioneer (Kirsten), Civil War (Addy), Victorian (Samantha), and WWII (Molly). It also includes issues of independence and self-governance (Felicity), immigration and adaptation/incorporation (Kirsten), slavery and freedom (Addy), class (Samantha), gender roles (Molly), and ethnicity and nationality (Josefina) which become part of the construction of an American identity.

Depicting the Present: The AG of Today

Pleasant Company's construction of an American identity is also furthered through the depiction of an American (girl) present. The AG of Today's dolls, accessories and outfits are the site of this portrayal. These products' signifying work is performed in a different way than the AG Collection's. In the latter, dolls become characters through the books, which provide them with personalities, historical backgrounds and details that are efficiently commodified into the AG products featured in the catalogs. On the other hand, the AG of Today is, seemingly, just a doll that can be ordered in 20 different combinations of skin, hair and eye color. However, these dolls are transformed into characters through their identification (and validation) with "you=American girl:"

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[13] Placing Josefina in New Mexico does not help either. During the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, an ACOG (Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games) operator denied a person calling from New Mexico the opportunity to buy tickets on the basis that ACOG could not sell tickets to "someone who lives outside the United States" ("Atlanta Olympic", 1996).

> You're the inspiration for a whole new line—a collection of simply great stuff that celebrates who you are today, and what you love to do. In fact, its' even named after you—American Girl! (Fall[a] 1996, p. 66).
>
> There's the American Girl of Today— a doll like you, with mini-gear that matches yours. Her adventures are your adventures. Her dreams are your dreams! (p. 67).

Even though these dolls do not have stories,[14] they come with a special issue of American Girl magazine, which is represented as their accompanying text, "Here's *her story*, too!" (emphasis in the original, Holiday[a] 1998, p. 75). The magazine is also linked, through identification, with its audience, since it is "bright and energetic, spirited and full of fun—*just like you*!" (emphasis added, Fall[a] 1996, p. 66). In short, the AG of Today conflates dolls and real girls, in the same fashion as the historical collection did with dolls and characters.

Pleasant Company's portrayal of the American present, through its merchandise, is organized in a similar fashion as the historical collection's presentation of its line of products—school, holidays, birthday, sleep-related activities (slumber parties), summer and winter outdoor activities. However, unlike the historical collection, whose products (and their presentation) stay the same catalog after catalog, the AG of Today continuously features new outfits and accessories which represent different contemporary facets of girls' life in America. In this sense, this AG present is dynamic. It is also a colorful present. The different combinations of skin, hair and eye color of the dolls are complemented by outfits and accessories in bright bold colors, which are reinforced by the text's use of boldfaced, colorful type for emphasis, giving an impression of contemporary fun.

The AG present emphasizes diversity and multiculturalism. It includes outfits and accessories for Kwanzaa, Hanukkah and the Chinese New Year. It features diverse activities—in-line skating, horseback riding, camping, swimming, soccer, skiing, and even an Earth Day outfit:

> Celebrate Earth Day—even on birthdays! Dress your doll in *bib overall shorts* and an individually tie-dyed *T-shirt*, then add a leather *barrette* to hold her hair back. Even her *sandals* make a statement—they leave the "recycle" imprint wherever she goes! ***GBOC $22*** (emphasis in the original, Spring[c] 1998, p. 58).

There is also a wheelchair and, of course, 20 different choices of faces including an Asian American, two African American, and several faces that could be classified as hispanic.

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[14] The AG of Today dolls come with a blank book and a Writer's Guide to help girls write their doll's story.

Notwithstanding its diversity, the AG present is socially privileged. Few, if any, public schools have student's desks as modern and expensive as the one featured in the AG catalog. Not all contemporary girls have their own computers (the catalog sells a "mini Macintosh"), are able to go snow skiing dressed in a "speedy silver and black ski suit with matching gloves and headband" (Holiday^a 1998, p. 89), or can afford to take violin, ballet, or horseback riding lessons. It is an idealized version of the present, in which girls are depicted (through the dolls) as having many options that they can include in their lifestyles.

The AG of Today dolls/girls are also privileged because they own AG dolls. That is, real girls own AG of Today dolls that are a representation of them. Therefore, these dolls also own AG dolls, books, and magazines (like their owners do). Miniature, six-inch versions of the historical dolls are sold with an also tiny hardcover version of their first book ($20). Sleepwear for the dolls is sold with tiny versions of American Library books, such as *Crafts for Girls*, *Games and Giggles*, and *Help!* A mini version of the American Girl magazine is one of the accessories that can be acquired for the AG of Today. Also, each issue of the magazine has also a "Mini-Mag" so girls can make their dolls their "own miniature copy of American Girl" (American Girl, January/February 1997, p. 45). It is a curious and clever maneuver in which the historical collection becomes a signifier of what it means to be a contemporary American girl. At the same time, the AG of Today is further validated as an accurate representation of contemporary American girlhood.

There is a clear sense of history-in-the-making surrounding the AG of Today. The initial reference, again, is the historical collection, which makes history and the American past real through the six dolls/characters and their related texts and merchandise. Following this "dolls-make-it-real" rationale, contemporary girls also become part of history because there are dolls "just like" them. "She's just like *you*. You're a part of *history*, too!" (emphasis in the original, Fall^a 1996, pp. 68-69). "[t]his is her moment in history, and your moment too" (Holiday^a 1998, pp. 72-73).

Summarizing, the AG of Today collection conflates its dolls with contemporary girls, defined in the text as the audience, "you=American girl." By doing this, the collection validates itself as an accurate representation of the American (girl) present. It is a colorful version of the present characterized by change and by the organization of life in school, holidays, birthdays, outdoor activities, and sleeping-associated activities. This AG present while embracing diversity and multiculturalism, depicts an idealized and socially-privileged reality which includes beautiful outfits and expensive accessories and activities, including ownership of AG products. Finally, the AG of Today links past to present by defining girls as history makers.

Diversity, Ethnicity, Values and American Girls

As explained in preceding sections, Pleasant Company uses the term "American girl" to identify the intended receivers of its marketing message. However, the term is further defined through the company's catalogs, books, and products. Through the AG Collection, "American girl" is connected to a particular version of the past. In the same manner, the term is connected to a portrayal of the present as depicted by the AG of Today line. Through these links with an AG past and present, Pleasant Company develops a concept of American girl. This section looks further into this concept focusing on its links with issues of nationality, ethnicity, and values. I highlight the marketing tactics employed and the work they perform through the text, which represent Pleasant Company's products as endowed with values, and, in consequence, worthy of being purchased.

Obviously, the term "American girl" involves issues of nationality. It tells us that the collections are not concerned with "German", "Korean," or "Peruvian" girls. American girls, in the U.S. context, has a straightforward meaning, i.e.: U.S. girls.[15] Through these products—cultural artifacts—"nation-ness" (Anderson, 1983, p. 13) is constructed. It is a concept of nationality that includes a heterogeneous group, in the sense that they represent diverse physical characteristics. The historical collection includes six different combinations of skin, hair and eye color:

Felicity	white skin, red hair, green eyes
Josefina	tan skin, "mahogany" brown hair, brown eyes

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[15] The meaning would not be as straightforward in a different context. For instance, in Central and South America, Latin American girls are also American girls.

Kirsten	white skin, blond hair, blue eyes
Addy	brown skin, dark brown "textured" hair, brown eyes
Samantha	white skin, brown hair, brown eyes
Molly	white skin, brown hair, gray eyes

The AG of Today offers 20 combinations that mix light, medium, or dark skin with five possibilities of eye color (light brown, dark brown, blue, green), and six choices of hair (dark brown, light brown, textured black, black, blond, red). The result is a picture of American girls that is ethnically and visually diverse. This is reinforced through the catalogs' use of girls from assorted ethnical backgrounds as models, and through the AG Library books' illustrations which also depict an heterogeneous group of girls.

The question is, what do the members of this diverse group, i.e.: American girls, have in common? What unites them? Pleasant Company's answer is that American girls are united through history (as explained in the two previous sections) and by a particular set of values that remains unchanged through time:

> The American Girls Collection [...] created to give girls an understanding of America's past and a sense of pride in the *values and traditions* they share with girls of yesterday (emphasis added, Fall[b] 1997, p. 1).
>
> *[F]amilies, friendships, and feelings,* haven't changed through the years. These are the important things that American girls will always share (emphasis added, Spring[b] 1998, p. 2).
>
> Save The American Girls Collection for that day when she is truly ready and able to understand its historical lessons and to embrace the important *values* that the books teach and that doll play reinforces" (emphasis added, Winter 1998, p. 1).

Moreover, the one-sentence descriptions of the historical dolls endorse qualities such as being "spunky and spritely," "courageous," "bright," and "lovable." These are sanctioned as desirable qualities/values for American girls. The catalog's persistent representation of its products as links between entertainment and education, becomes an AG value in itself, along with the romanticization of the AG past and present. The catalogs use parents' testimonials to further bolster the idea that American girls (and AG products) are about values:

> Your product line reinforces so many of the things I hope to teach my daughter—a love of reading, a passion for history, a rich imagination, and an appreciation for

> cultural diversity (Holiday[a] 1998, p. 3).
>
> Molly's more than a doll—she somehow embodies the best of childhood (Spring 1997, p. 52).
>
> Thank you for being a company that obviously cares enough about our children to offer them not only an entertaining experience, but also an education in our past, traditions, and values (Holiday[a] 1998, p. 62).

The AG catalogs manage to market their products successfully, while constructing a self-image of a company that fosters values. This is accomplished through carefully-crafted copy that sells *and* highlights AG values at the same time:

> With American Girl Gear you'll find it doesn't take a lot of clothes to look great, just a little *creativity*. American Girl Gear is designed to *mix and match* your way, so when you dress yourself you can *express yourself*.
>
> But remember, it's who you are, not what you wear, that matters. Spunk and *spirit* will always win over style. A *kind heart* will always beat a closetful of clothes. And the *best-dressed* girl is the one who always wears the biggest *smile*. That's real American Girl style! (emphasis in the original, Fall[b] 1997, pp. 2-3).

This is advertising standard practice, i.e.: to co-opt even the most progressive social movements and ideas. The catalogs cleverly market their merchandise—material articles—by draping them with a righteousness cloak that (ironically) champions the idea that it is not material things which make up, or are important for American girls. AG catalogs frequently conflate their products with generally-valued relationships such as friendship. By equating clothes with friends, the text succeeds in drawing parallels between AG merchandise and AG values, e.g.: outfits are old friends, jeans are like a great friendship.

> Favorite outfits can be like old friends, too. Spice them up with a bright new sweater or a snappy new vest and you'll see how much more fun they are to wear. Variety, in friends and fashion, really is the spice of life! (p. 17).
>
> The new girl next to you looks shy. Say hi! You might find you have a lot in common. Like how you both get the giggles late at night, love cheesy popcorn, or like to wear easy clothes! These true-blue denims are friendly and familiar. They feel just right—like the start of a great friendship! (Holiday[a] 1998, p. 103).

Another successful marketing tactic present in the AG catalogs is to advice girls to perform certain activities that will lead them into purchasing the AG products. For instance, in the AG Gear section of a 1997 catalog, there is a double-page spread headlined "Time for Sports." The spread features the AG Library book *Here's How* and a girl in a leotard performing a gymnastic exercise. The copy, placed under a large sub-head that reads "Try," exhorts girls to do sports:

> You don't have to be great at a sport to get a lot out of it. There's the fun of trying something new, seeing yourself improve, or being part of a team that pulls together. Sometimes, though, a little "inside information" can give you the confidence you need to get started.
> Check out *Here's How* and learn how to spin a basketball, dance the hula, throw like a pro, spin on skates, and more. A little practice and you'll be ready to play. Try it. You'll like it (Fall[a] 1997, pp. 20-21).

The next two pages, headlined "Play hard. Play fair. Play your best!" feature AG sports clothes for hockey, bowling, volleyball, ice skating, dance, soccer and basketball. Clothes and book are sold by highlighting a generally accepted value. In this case, that of sports activities. The need for sports (and for their sports merchandise) is stressed and successfully created.

Pleasant Company's catalogs, books, and products constitute a well-designed, thorough, and efficient marketing machine. By associating its merchandise with "American" values (especially with education), the company succeeds in separating itself from other toy makers. The text constructs an image of a company that is not motivated by profit, but is inspired by the well being of young American girls. In the process, it delineates an American girl who is ethnically diverse, privileged, endowed with certain values, and—last but not least—an AG customer.

Empowering American Girls

Pleasant Company, with its clever marketing strategy using catalogs (and merchandise) to depict a romanticized version of the past and a socio-economically privileged account of the present, also includes an empowering message for girls. The construction of an exclusive focus on American girls is, in itself, empowering. It assigns importance to girls in a "girl-poisoning culture" that oppresses them by subjecting them to "incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated" (Pipher, 1994, p. 12). This is highlighted throughout by the Company's depiction of its relationship with the girls. They "believe that what [girls] say is important" (Fall[b] 1997, p. 1), therefore, "they talk to us, and we listen" (Holiday[b] 1997, p. 1) establishing "a bond of trust with American girls" (p. 1).

The catalogs are explicit about their empowerment intentions which are also used as a marketing strategy that will sell their products:

> [W]e are committed to giving girls a sense of pride, possibility, and power in this, their moment in history (p. 1).
>
> [W]e link past to present and empower girls to take pride in this, their moment in history (Fall [a] 1997, p. 1).

The text attempts to empower girls by giving them a special role in history, telling them that "this is your time to shine" and "you're part of history too!" In this way, it seeks to bolster girls's sense of self-importance and provides essential (historical) grounding for their American girl identity (Woodward, 1997). This is reinforced with the products' emphasis that American girls (and dolls) are "unique one-of-a-kind original[s]" (Holiday[a] 1996, p. 67), destined to play historical roles.

Through visual and verbal language, the catalogs continuously identify girls with the dolls (historical and AG of Today). By representing the historical dolls as role models and by celebrating the AG of Today, the catalogs and books convey that being American girls is "great," "something to celebrate" (Fall[a] 1996, p. 1) and "something to be proud of" (Fall[b] 1996).[16] At the same time, the catalogs construct a community of girls who, by being AG consumers, become a special brand of "American girls:"

> Are you a fan of The American Girls Collection? If the answer is "YES," then The American Girls Club wants you! Join thousands of girls across the country—new friends who love Felicity, Kirsten, Addy, Samantha, and Molly just like you do! (Holiday[a] 1996, p. 65).

The community goes beyond the members of this club who "share [their] experiences, swap secrets, and compare notes with a [pen pal] who loves the American Girls as much as you do" (p. 65). It is built through the AG magazine, AG Library books, AG events, reading groups, and through the catalogs' quotes from girls who share their experiences/advice with readers. For instance, in one of 1998 holiday catalogs, there were several pages that featured girls with band musical instruments modelling some AG Gear. The copy describes pre-concert jitters and shares "tips from girls like you who've been under the bright lights before!" (Holiday[a] 1998, p. 111). In this way, Pleasant Company gives girls a sense of being part of a special group of girls with shared values, experiences, and consumption practices. This sense of belonging is also empowering.

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[16] To celebrate Pleasant Company's tenth anniversary, the company sold doll/girl special edition matching t-shirts that declared "Proud to be an American Girl!"

Summarizing, the AG products is a case in which profit-seeking marketing strategies can simultaneously be empowering for girls by portraying them as special, unique historical role-players who belong to a special community, that of American girls.

CONCLUSION

Pleasant Company's success is largely based on its thoroughness and attention to detail in all aspects of the development, promotion, and sale of its products. The textual analysis of the AG texts exposed skillfully crafted copy and effective visual language that efficiently project Pleasant Company's selling message.

The circuit of culture furnished an adequate theoretical framework for the study. Its emphasis on the interconnectedness of distinct, but not discrete, moments in which meanings are produced, modified, and struggled over, provided an excellent model for the cultural analysis of the AG dolls. In addition, the circuit's acknowledgement that the cultural process is too complex to be understood in terms of existing theories that are limited to the explanation of one of its moments, offered the opportunity to use different theoretical perspectives to inform the study of representation and identity, which were this paper's main concerns.

Identification, "one of the least well understood concepts" (Hall, 1996, p. 2), is a dynamic, never ending project in the making. The AG texts—dolls, catalogs, books, etc.—attempt to fix and influence this process in order to sell their products. The AG catalogs and merchandise appeal to girls by establishing an identification between their merchandise and their younger audience. This is achieved through various channels. First, the company constructs its audience, "you=American girl," and a special relationship between Pleasant company and that audience. Second, the AG of Today is represented as based, "inspired," by "you=American girl." In this way, the collection validates itself as an accurate representation of the American girl present and, at the same time, gives girls the opportunity of getting a doll that resembles them. Third, the catalogs also manufacture an identification link between girls and the historical dolls through the use of photographs of girls and dolls with identical outfits and similar physical characteristics. Moreover, since the historical dolls/characters' stories conflate the dolls with the U.S., the merchandise also establishes an identification link between girls and the U.S. that further develops an American girl identity. In sum, following standard advertising practice, Pleasant Company addresses its buyers by building an identification between these young consumers and its products.

The AG texts represent a romanticized version of the American past that highlights specific periods (colonial, pioneer, Civil War, Victorian, and WWII) and issues (independence, immigration, slavery, class, gender roles, and ethnicity). The texts also depict a dynamic, colorful, multicultural, and privileged American present. These versions of the past and present contribute to the construction of an American girl identity that, while not divorced from nationality, stress a set of values that render a fluid, culturally-based definition of American girls. However, this study also suggests that the catalogs' and books' representation of Josefina (and Josefina as a representation of "hispanic") succeed in perpetuating the simplistic idea that all hispanics are Mexican. Mexico functions as a synecdoche of Latin America. These catalogs, books, and this doll/character, Josefina, fail to present hispanics as an ingredient of the melting pot.

This paper is part of a larger study on the AG products that also includes the study of consumption through in-depth interviews of girls and their mothers, which is only the beginning of more work on the AG products and on much-needed media studies centered on girls. However, the variety of AG texts and products did not allow for textual analyses of all of them. For instance, the bimonthly *American Girl* magazine is an important AG text that should be the focus of a textual analysis. Expensive ($3.95 per issue, $19.95 per one-year—six issues—subscription) and with no commercial advertisement, the magazine boasts a circulation of 800,000. Its analysis is an essential part of the understanding of Pleasant Company's products and the community of girls united by them. I believe that the study of the store in Chicago, American Girl Place, is also obligatory. It should include both the textual analysis of the experience associated with the store,[17] and interviews with people who have shopped, dined, and being entertained in it.

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[17] For a similar analysis focusing on the Coca-Cola Museum in Atlanta, see Fursich & Lester (1998).

In order to close the circuit of culture, I intend to study the moments of production and regulation. The study of Pleasant Company's research and development of new products is essential to the understanding of how meanings are inscribed in production. This part of the study requires access to the company through interviews and/or document analysis. In this way, we could find answers to questions such as: why are immigrant girls portrayed through Scandinavian Kirsten, instead of using, for example, an Irish or an Italian girl? Why is hispanic Josefina placed in New Mexico (Mexico) in 1824? Why not develop a hispanic character/doll based on a Cuban girl who arrived to Miami on a balsa in 1964, or a Puerto Rican girl living in New York City? Why is Addy set in the Civil War and not in the Harlem Renaissance? Are there plans to develop Native American, Jewish, or Islamic dolls/characters? Why set up a huge store when they were so successful through direct marketing? Furthermore, the analysis of production should include the study of the changes derived from Mattel's purchase of Pleasant Company.[18] Looking at these changes will inevitably lead us into the study of how the AG dolls have influenced the regulation of cultural life, by changing the doll market and the parameters of consumption of dolls and girls paraphernalia.

In sum, this study and the future avenues of research described above will provide a thorough cultural study of the AG dolls. A contribution to the scant literature on girls and popular culture and to the important academic area of feminist cultural studies. A cultural analysis that will allow us to scrutinize who constructs girlhood and how this is done, the role played by the media in this construction, and its lasting influence in the lives of women.

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18. The Spring 99 catalog has a sticker explaining that this is the last full catalog until Fall. A radical change from the constant arrival of catalogs in previous years. In addition, the catalog does not include the Bitty Baby or the AG Gear. These two lines came in separate, smaller catalogs printed on non-glossy paper.

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Mediatized Politics:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of the *New York Times'* Editorials on the Clinton-Lewinsky Affair

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Abstract

Analyzing the media discourse of the Clitnon-Lewinsky affair, the present study illuminates the ideological topography of American society and the ongoing struggles among different ideologies. The semantic, syntactic and pragmatic analysis of the *New York Times*' editorials, published in a critical discourse moment, uncovered the sharp contradiction between the diagnostic discourse committed to monogamous moralism and legalism and the prognostic discourse committed to political pragmatism. The analysis of the ideological strategies showed that the *Times*, presupposing its democratic function, legitimatized or delegitimatized political actors and delusively empowered the public to support its preferred political solution to the affair.

Mediatized Politics: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the *New York Times'* Editorials on the Clinton-Lewinsky Affair

President Clinton's sexual affair, which had preoccupied Americans for years and consumed extensive media coverage and political resources, culminated in a symbolic trial in the Senate that willingly vindicated the President. The affair, which seemed to be simply an illicit sexual affair involving an immature woman and a politician who considered politics to be a lying game, had led to a four-year and $40 million investigation and finally ended with nothing but a supervictim: Monica Lewinsky. People and the mass media were fanatically concerned about the moral corruption of their President, whose affair might have been a family matter rather than a public one. Despite such severe blaming of the President, however, people did not seem to want to disrupt the normal electoral rhythm; they obviously wanted neither the President's resignation nor impeachment. The polls showed relatively stable and high job ratings and favorability ratings of the President even after the release of the Starr report.

In France, people did not care about the illicit love affair of their former socialist president, who had had an extramarital relationship for years, which resulted in a daughter from his mistress. In contrast, Americans, who seem more strongly committed to monogamous morality and legality, care excessively about their President's extramarital affair and his lies under oath about his sexual activities. At the same time, they seem to practically forgive such an immoral, unreliable and dishonest President, maybe because his job in economy has been satisfactory.

The present study focuses on the unique ideological features projected by popular discourses on the affair and the contradictions among different ideologies, like the obvious rupture between the diagnostic discourse and the prognostic one on the affair. Acknowledging that there might be a substantial gap between media discourse and actual public discourse, this study analyzes the media discourses on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. Since media discourse dominates the production and consumption of social communication, the analysis of media discourse helps us understand a variety of ideological presuppositions shared by the mass media and by ordinary people, which could finally contribute to revealing a unique sociocultural paradigm dominantly operating in American society.

A discourse analysis of media coverage may provide a critical starting point for determining the ideological topography of a society. That is not because the media simply mirror reality, but because they cultivate general concepts of a society and eventually mainstream its members (Gerbner et. al., 1980). Through a systematic analysis of language, a discourse analysis will present an elaborate description of the ongoing struggles among different ideologies inherent in media discourse.

Discourse, Ideology and Language

A great number of stories about the Clinton-Lewinsky affair have been circulated by the mass media. The stories are constructed based upon a set of unique presuppositions that ordinary Americans are supposed to share concerning power, the presidency, politics, privacy, morality, marriage, family, and sexual relationships. We usually call such stories *texts* or *discourses* without any sharp distinction between the two. According to Kress (1985), however, each term has its own quite specific and distinctive area of reference. That is, the term *text* has a more linguistic basis, while the term *discourse* has a more sociological basis (p. 27). Since the present study aims to delve into the ideological foundations and their sociocultural meanings inherent in the Clinton-Lewinsky stories, it would be appropriate to term the stories *discourses*. At the same time, since discourse always finds its expression in textual language, this study focuses its analysis on the discourses expressed in certain types of texts, in this case, media texts. Bell (1995) suggests four main reasons why we show interest in media discourse. First, the media are a rich source of readily accessible data for research. Second, media discourse influences and represents people's attitudes toward language in a speech community. Third, media discourse tells us a great deal about social meanings and stereotypes projected through language and communication. Fourth, media discourse reflects and influences the formation and expression of culture, politics, and social life (in Bell & Garrett, 1998, pp. 3-4).

As Kress argues, any one text may be the expression or realization of a number of sometimes competing and contradictory discourses (p. 27). For instances, the mass media delivered unedited footage of President Clinton's grand jury testimony, while emphasizing individual's right to privacy. The media severely blamed the President for his immorality and his lying, which violated the spirit of the American Constitution, while arguing for a non-partisan compromise on a consumptive political power game named "The Presidential Sexual Scandal." These contradictions are related to the competitions between discourses, such as public versus private, patriarchic versus feminist, democratic versus undemocratic, economic versus political, and so on. Such contradictions are not mere coincidences but may originate from the ongoing struggles among different ideologies. Along this line, a discourse can be considered as a set of ideological presuppositions, although Foucault (1971) views a discourse essentially as a mode of talking.

Kress further argues that ideologies[1] find their clearest articulation in language, and linguistic forms always appear as the signs of the system of meaning in specific discourses (pp. 29-30). A discourse related to a particular ideology cannot be neutral in selecting its languages: thus, the examination of linguistic forms of a specific discourse is a powerful way to fresh out its ideological structure. The examination of the media discourse that dominates the whole market of social discourses is an especially powerful means to understand the ideological fields in which a society operates and its members weave everyday practices. Fairclough (1998) supports this point of view by arguing that mediatized political discourse is an important part of contemporary politics, since the internal order of discourses within the political system and the external order of discourses between different systems are articulated through the media (p. 147).

In *Orders of Discourse*, Foucault (1971) hypothesizes that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures—the procedures of exclusion. This study tests his hypothesis with a critical discourse analysis of the press coverage of President Clinton's affair. As a methodology, critical discourse analysis has the power to reveal implicit meanings, sometimes contradicting the explicit meanings, by exploring every linguistic aspect of a targeted discursive text. Although a newspaper is ostensibly critical of the powerful and it explicitly sympathizes with and appears to promote the powerless' interests, its languages tacitly characterize the powerless as inherently powerless and the powerful as inherently powerful (Fowler, 1985, p. 76). Lule (1995) also argues that the racist press never explicitly expresses its discriminatory ideology. Rather, by not appearing openly ideological, the mainstream press reporting becomes all the more ideologically effective (Reese, 1990, p.392). Only by examining every lexicon, such as vocabularies, metaphors or definitions, and every structural relationship among the lexicons, can we see through the foundational ideologies conveyed by certain discourses. Critical discourse analysis suggests the way in which we can approach a discourse as a set of ideological presuppositions.

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[1] Here, Kress regards ideologies as essentially concerned with forms of knowledge and their relations to class structure, class conflict, class interest, modes of production and economic structure and with forms of knowledge in specific social practices (p. 29). But I would like to use the term *ideology* as socially shared, common notions, which structure a variety of power relations and everyday practices.

Critical Discourse Analysis: An Analytical Map

As noted above, discourse analysis mainly investigates the social and ideological dimensions of language (Potter, 1996, p. 137). Among various approaches of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), which originated from critical linguistics, has produced a majority of the research on media discourse during the 1980s and 1990s. It has arguably become the standard framework for studying media texts within European linguistics and discourse studies (Bell & Garrett, 1998, p. 6).

CDA sees discourse as a form of social practice. Such discursive practice may have major ideological effects; it can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between social classes, genders, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways which it represents things and positions people (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Fairclough (1998) argues that a key feature of CDA is that the link between texts and society/culture is seen as mediated by such discursive practices. Thus, the purpose of CDA is mainly to reveal the particular ways which certain ideological presuppositions organize linguistic structures in discursive texts.

To analyze mediatized discourses, three analytical dimensions should be considered: semantics, syntax, and pragmatics (Chilton & Schaffner, 1997, p. 214). First, the dimension of semantics refers to the sociolinguistic varieties or the "ranges of semantic potential" of a particular discourse, such as structured lexical fields and recurrent metaphors (Fowler, p. 66; Chilton & Schaffner, p. 222). This analytical dimension is related to which concepts are furnished with names in the discourses; the provision of a name for a concept is called *lexicalization* or a *lexical process* (Halliday, 1978, in Fowler, p. 69).

Second, the dimension of syntax refers to the syntactical organization of languages, which is closely related to the social or personal needs that language is required to serve (Halliday, 1970, in Fowler, p. 66). This analytical dimension deals with the ways to claim causation, agency and responsibility: for instance, "who (*agent*) is doing what (*processes of moving, affecting, causing, etc.*) to whom (*patient*), where (*location*), why (*cause, purpose*) by what means (*instrument*)" (Chilton & Schaffner, p. 223). Concretely, the syntactical dimension includes transitivity and other syntactic variability such as deletion (particularly in nominalization or passive form), sequencing (the order of actors) and complexity. In addition, modality (obliged to, unlikely, possible, etc.) can be considered as a syntactic device that indicates the author's attitude to the propositions she or he utters (Fowler, pp. 69-73).

Third, the dimension of pragmatics refers to the interactions between speakers and hearers/readers, such as speech acts. This dimension is based upon the notion that language and action cannot be separated. Although a pragmatic analysis is better applied to a mediatized political speech, some speech acts can be found in mediatized written texts. Those are *representatives* (truth claims), *directives* (commands, requests), *commissives* (promises, threats, offering), *expressives* (praising, blaming), and *declaratives* (proclaiming a constitution, announcing an election, declaring war, etc.). Analyzing various forms of speech acts can help create a map of the sociopolitical relationships among actors, related to a discursive practice (Chilton & Schaffner, p. 216).

While analyzing opinion news articles such as editorials or Op-eds, Van Dijk (1998) suggests various levels and dimensions of discourse. Above all, he emphasizes the semantic structure of discourse such as lexical items, propositions, implications, presupposition, description, coherence, semantic moves and integration. Lexical items may express general or contextual values or norms, since words may be chosen depending on which ideological or value system is presupposed. According to Van Dijk, lexical items usually compose propositions by clauses and sentences. Such propositions can be analyzed in terms of a main predicate, a specific semantic role such as agent or patient, and a modality, since these propositional structures themselves may express opinions. In addition, we need to analyze both the local and global coherence of discourse to grasp how the propositions unite as a whole or whether they are arbitrarily related to one another (pp. 36- 39). This analysis is more critical, especially when we find implicit contradictions between local and global coherence, namely *semantic moves*.

Furthermore, Van Dijk points out a general strategy employed for expressing certain ideologies, namely, *the strategy of polarization*, which may be another name for the procedures of exclusion but a much more practical term. This strategy consistently seeks positive ingroup descriptions (Our people/Good properties or actions) and negative outgroup descriptions (Their people/Bad properties or actions) on levels that are both explicit and implicit (pp. 32-33). Thus, it would be very useful to trace who are described as "We" or "They" in order to tease out the ideological foundations behind certain discourses. This polarizing strategy is also elaborated in terms of generality and abstractness. That is, "Our" good actions and "Their" bad actions are specified with many detailed propositions, while "Our" bad actions and "Their" good actions are described in rather general, abstract and hence 'distanced' terms (p. 35).

In summary, a critical discourse analysis is not concerned only with the linguistic structure of a text, but also examines the contexts of the discursive practice, thus consequently contributing to revealing the ideological bases of a society.

A Methodological Map

The three dimensions of semantics, syntax and pragmatics, suggested mainly by Fowler and Van Dijk, were employed as analytical tools. Thus, each word and each sentence in the media texts were examined as analytical units in terms of the three analytical dimensions. The specific analytical framework is presented in Figure 1.

This study aimed particularly to determine how a discourse drove a strategy of polarization or exclusion, and what ideologies were advocated through such a strategy in the media discourses on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. The strategy of polarization or exclusion was investigated according to such strategic functions as coercion, resistance/opposition or protest, dissimulation, and legitimatization/delegitimatization, as suggested by Chilton & Schaffner.

The *New York Times*' editorials on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, which appeared for two weeks before and for two weeks after the release of the Starr report, were selected as the objects of analysis. Since editorials in the press are generally considered to express opinions based upon unique ideological presuppositions, they can be regarded appropriate objects for this study. The one-month time period (September 1~30, 1998) surrounding the date of the release of the Starr report (September 12, 1998) was set up particularly in order to trace the probable changes in the media discourses surrounding the release of the report. The investigation of such changes was expected to show the contradictions among discourses that implied the struggles among ideologies. Following Gamson's (1992) term, this period can be called a *critical discourse moment* which makes discourses on an issue especially visible and stimulates commentaries in various public forums by sponsors of different frames (in Croteau, Hoynes, & Carragee, 1996, p. 33).

In addition, the *New York Times* was selected as the object of analysis because of the following considerations. According to Van Dijk, the *New York Times* probably

Figure 1. The Analytical Framework of A Critical Discourse Analysis

Analysis of Semantics	Analysis of Syntax	Analysis of Pragmatics
Lexical Item Proposition Semantic Moves Coherence (Local & Global)	Agent-Action Structure (Sequencing, Transitivity, Deletion of subjects, Nomianlization) Modality	Representatives Directives Commissives Expressives Declaratives

exhibits the fragments of an overall American ideological perspective on news events and the world, while expressing relatively liberal opinions. As cited by Keshishian (1997), Merrill defines the *New York Times* as a national and world leader in the area of journalism (p. 336). In analyzing the *New York Times*' coverage of the West German Green Party, Carragee (1991) also argues that the *Times* is a significant source of information for other news media. According to him, the *Times* particularly reaches individuals who hold positions of power and influence, while enjoying a large daily circulation and a notable historical reputation (p. 7).

A total of ten editorials (September 3, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 21, 22, 24 & 30, 1998) were copied from the original editions of the newspaper published during the period and stored at the General Library of the University of Texas at Austin. Since a critical discourse analysis usually investigates a mediatized political speech orl interview, or a few newspaper articles of an issue, this sample size is more than adequate to conduct a discourse analysis. Other news stories that appeared in the editorial sections were consulted as supplementary evidence.

Analysis of Semantics

Lexical items

Traditionally best known in studies of ideology and language is the analysis of lexical items (Van Dijk, p. 31). The adjectives most frequently assigned to President Clinton by the *Times'* editorials are *reckless, self-destructive, mendacious, disappointing, preposterous* and *tawdry*. These vocabulary words are very evaluative rather than factual, while focusing on President's immorality and expressing the editors' disappointments with his worn out *comeback kid* strategy and legalistic dodging. The editorials define

President Clinton's miscalculation about the strategy to overcome his political predicament as a *lack* and *lateness* of *contrition*. As a person, President Clinton is consistently termed as an *adolescent* or even *teenager*.[2] As a president, he is usually portrayed as an *astute politician* and *adroit card player*. The editorials diagnose the affair as *adultery*, *false swearing*, *witness tampering*, *abuse of office* or *obstruction of justice*; and within the macro frame, *abuse of truth*; and they define the current situation as a *national crisis* but they do not detail what exactly is the national crisis. As Gastil (1992) points out, *truth* or *justice* is an imprecise word, like the word *democracy*, which speakers typically use without providing a clear meaning. Gastil suggests the reasons why one would use such empty words as follows: First, vagueness allows different listeners to infer contradictory meanings, causing them to agree with the speaker for entirely different reasons. Second, extreme ambiguity can serve as camouflage, in that such ambiguity makes unpleasant facts less obvious and the speaker can easily deny his or her statement afterwards. Third, the repetition of meaningless words anesthetizes listeners' brains, making them less critical and more receptive (p. 476). As a strategy of dissimulation, such euphemization disguises any essential natures of the affair.

The word *contrition* is another word consistently positioned in the core of the prognostic discourse of the affair. The word *contrition* is also euphemistic, in the sense that it apparently suggests a moralistic solution to the national crisis which has been rhetorically exaggerated, but actually the word allows any possible resolutions, because of its emptiness. Thus, there is no substantial or logical correspondence between the diagnostic phrase *abuse of justice* or *abuse of truth* and the prognostic word *contrition*. The word *contrition* just seems to deceptively satisfy people's probable concerns with morality. Here, we can witness an implicit contradiction between moralistic diagnostic discourse and political or practical prognostic discourse on the affair. Although the editorials insist that truth should be the sovereign of political medicines, they actually suggest a political compromise that would accompany the President's rhetorical contrition as a solution to the national, but actually the President's own, crisis. Such a solution is termed a *Clinton plea bargain* (September 16, 1998).

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[2] In her Op-Art, Jules Feiffer sarcastically says, "the real problem of the Clinton Presidency is not that he lied under oath or obstructed justice. The real problem is that there is a teenager living in the White House. Clumsy, flirtatious, demanding, rejecting, scared, shamed, dishonest,

The *Times'* editorials diagnose with sympathy that President Clinton is nothing more than the victim of his and his staffs' bad judgments and miscalculations. Thus, more severe blame is directed toward another target, the White House legal counselor David Kendall. He is assigned such lexical items as a *destructive man* and a *scorched-earth legalist*. The editors consistently try to separate the President from his clumsy counselor, and their efforts seem to have been successful, in that the President dismissed Mr. Kendall and assigned new counselors to his defense team a few days after the release of the Starr report (September 16, 1998).

On the other hand, the predicates assigned to Congressional Democrats are consistently positive, for instance, *valuable*, *thoughtful*, *fair*, etc. Some editorials sharply contrast Congressional Democrats with their leader, President Clinton. Democrats who criticize their leader are praised as the *Democratic leadership*. The September 9 editorial says,

> Mr. Clinton's fellow Democrats did the country a valuable service ...by initiating a thoughtful debate about the President's behavior... Senator Joseph Lieberman, a

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difficult...just classic adolescent...I don't think he should be impeached. I think he should be grounded " (The *New York Times*, p. A31, September 15, 1998).

> long time Clinton ally, made clear in an anguished, unsparing speech…Mr. Clinton's cryptic comments would not suffice.

Such separation between Democrats and their troubled leader seems to exert politically meaningful effects; it endows the highly risky Democratic candidates, who have upcoming elections, with the status of the legitimate managers of the national crisis that their *indefensible* leader caused.

Although the metaphor *crumbled stonewall* strongly implies the Democrats' disaffection with and censure of the President, Democrats are still modified by such royal terms as *loyalty*, *ally* or *follower*, however. Those linguistic choices reflect a still unchanged hierarchy of political power. That means the separation of the President and the other Democrats is a strategy of dissimulation that just temporarily excludes the President from the legitimate ingroup for both the goals of President's safe escape from his political predicament and the reelections of Congressional Democrats.

In this line, Republicans are not categorized as the enemy of Democrats. While the President is temporarily isolated, both Congressional Republicans and Democrats are presented as the only legitimized problem-solvers. Even though the budget conflicts are portrayed as *partisan wars*, the struggles surrounding the impeachment of the President of the United States are not described as a partisan combat. The subtle linguistic assignments temporarily bind Republicans and Democrats into an ingroup, which functions as a strong ground for the editorials' insistence on a negotiated settlement of the ongoing impeachment debate.

The editorials take the gap between the *grass roots* and *elite opinion* as another rationale for a negotiated settlement. Again, both *grass root* and *elite opinion* are totally empty phrases. No explanation is given about who exactly are the grass roots or the elites and what exactly is the difference between the two.

Terming the period after the release of the Starr report *the second debate*, however, the tone of the editorials takes a turn (September 24, 1998); from about ten days after the release, there are found gradual changes in the lexical items assigned to the President and other political actors.

An editorial endorses Mr. Clinton's *strange power* that defeated the Republicans in the *budget war* (September 21, 1998). The editorial portrays President Clinton as a winner in the *budget war* having a *peculiar new weapon*. In the next day's editorial, the reasons why he delivered the disastrous nationally televised speech on August 17 are sympathetically explained. Subsequent editorials diagnose the current situation as *the winds abated a bit*.

Conversely, the Republican Congress' decision to broadcast the videotape of President Clinton's grand jury testimony is portrayed a *hostile partisan act* which goes against a *healthy civic purpose*. Kenneth Starr also is portrayed as an actor to whom negative predicates are frequently assigned. Prior to the release, the editorials used to contrast Kenneth Starr with David Kendall, portraying the independent prosecutor as legitimate. In the stage of so-called second debate, however, the *Times*' editorials bring up such concepts as *legal competence*, *fairness* and *prosecutorial misconduct* into the discourses on Kenneth Starr. An editorial says, "Mr. Starr is under heavy attack, much of it fueled by flaws and omissions in the report that he sent to the House of Representatives…casting Mr. Starr as a witch-hunting ideologue and a sexual McCarthyite" (September 24, 1998). The very editorial also points out the *lack of* *restraint* of the Starr report, especially in the detailed expressions about the President's hallway sex with his mistress. The mass medium, however, does not reflect on its own sensationalism, although it itself has sold the Clinton-Lewinsky story as a sexually explicit soap opera.

In the second stage, Democrats are described reasonably *willing* to help their leader navigate out of his *legal jeopardy*. Instead of highlighting still remaining conflicts between the President and his Democratic followers, the editorials now identify *health care profiteers*, *talkative mistresses* and *right wing conspirators* as the real enemies of the President. In summary, in the stage of so-called second debate, the editorials partly delegitimatize Kenneth Starr, Republicans and even Congress, while cautiously returning the President to ingroup.

Propositions

The central proposition of the mediatized discourse on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair is that *no citizen including the President is above the law*. The editorials themselves, however, violate the foundational proposition by advising Democrats and Republicans to settle the sex-scandal crisis, not by impeaching the President who lied under oath, but by making a compromise with each other for the sake of national interests (September16, 1998). Such an obvious violation is excused by another proposition that *the public desires settlement*. Neither the identity of the public nor its specific demand, however, is unambiguous. Ironically, the editorials assert that the public is tired of Clinton's affair on one hand, while arguing that the public has not yet been fully informed of its detailed contents, on the other hand. Sometimes the public's intelligence is presupposed, but other times it is questioned. In short, the editorials legitimatize their preferred political solution by illusorily empowering the public and by promoting a political mythology of the democracy of decision-making.

The editors assert that *a President without public respect or Congressional support cannot last* (September 12, 1998), but, at the same time, they insist that the national crisis has to be resolved at the imprecise point where legal and constitutional principles intersect with controlling political reality. They, however, do not provide any specific legal or constitutional principles nor unambiguously illuminate the meaning of the political reality, which justifies the President's contrition and Congressional censure as the desirable solution to the constructed crisis.

Semantic moves and Coherence

According to Van Dijk, one clause may express a proposition that realizes one ideological strategy but the next clause may convey another proposition that realizes another strategy which is different from or even conflicting with the previous one, on the local level of sentence sequences (p. 39). Such semantic moves, as a ritualized mode of editorials, make ambiguous the contradiction between local coherence and global coherence. Semantic moves are frequently employed in political discourse, since they endow even a strongly biased speaker with impartiality, by allowing him or her to deceptively take both sides of a controversial issue or criticize both. Such conjunctions as *but*, *however*, *if* or *although* frequently create semantic moves. For instances, the September 12 editorial reads, "this page has long held a similar view of the sanctity of law, *but* [italics added] we grant that the magnitude, complexity and the oddness of this case require deep deliberation," and the September 16 editorial reads,

> This page has persistently criticized Mr. Clinton's conduct and abuse of truth and we are prepared to see the impeachment process through to a resolution *if* he

> remains unwilling to concede that he lied under oath. *But* [italics added] we also see that the national interest could be served by a settlement that allows Mr. Clinton to stay in office with a heavy Congressional reprimand.

These semantic moves strongly imply that the impeachment is against the national interest, although most readers have not been informed of what exactly is the national interest. In this way, most editorials severely criticize the President on local levels, but they ultimately rationalize their global argument for a negotiated settlement or a so-called grand compromise mainly through semantic moves.

Analysis of Syntax

Agent-action structure

Agent-action structure generally includes sequencing, transitivity, deletion of the subject and nominalization. Before and after the release of the Starr report, there are found obvious changes in terms of the four aspects of agent-action structure. Around the release of the Starr report, Congressional Democrats and Congress itself appear as central agents of transitive sentences, while the President as an agent of certain active actions temporarily disappears. This agent-action structure parallels the lexical choices by which the editorials temporarily exclude the President from the ingroup and define Democrats or Congress as the ingroup. For instance, the September 11 editorial says, "There are…reasons for pride in Congress's initial handling of the Starr report and in the Democratic leadership's attempts to discipline their President toward greater truthfulness and contrition." With the exceptions of such local exclusions, however, the President is generally positioned as a subject of a transitive action, especially in the second-stage editorials. That means that the syntactical structure of the media discourses eventually empowers the President not other political actors.

The editorials usually diagnose the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, using nominalized phrases that delete the President, the most importantly involved agent. That is, instead of such sentences as "the President obstructed justice" or "he tampered with a witness," the editorials use the noun phrases *obstruction of justice* or *witness tampering*. According to Fowler, nominalization has two ideologically practical consequences: First, they are a source of new nouns and codings of experience that can be transmitted to the appropriate social groups by propaganda or education. Second, they permit the deletions of both agency and modality, thus making equivocal who is responsible for the action (p. 71). The nominalizations employed by the *Times*' editorials seem to produce the latter consequence.

In addition, the *Times*' editorials frequently delete subjects by using participial phrases. Such participial phrases as *shaken friends*, *crumbled stonewall*, *hobbled leadership*, *discredited leader*, *blasted Presidency*, and *diminished reputation* conceal by whom and by what such states were engendered. The phrase *informed decision* does not elucidate how or by whom the public can be informed, and the phrase *negotiated settlement* deletes the participants who are responsible for negotiating any kinds of solutions. There is another example of the intentional deletion of agency. In terming the sexual scandal, the editorials consistently omit the name of Clinton. Instead, they call the affair just the *Monica Lewinsky affair* or the *Lewinsky affair*. Such a deletion dilutes the responsibility of the President, instead blaming more the *desperately star-struck woman*, Monica Lewinsky.

Another aspect that should be examined in the agent-action structure is either of the generality or the abstractness of a given action. Prior to the release of the Starr report, the President's bad actions or his legal counselor David Kendall's bad actions are specified. On the other side, some particular remarks made by Democrats or other Congressmen like House Speaker Newt Gingrich are quoted in detail. As Van Dijk notes (pp. 35-36), the editorials concretely describe positive ingroup (Democrats & Congress) actions and negative outgroup (the President & his staff) actions. In the stage of so-called second debate, however, the editorials concretely illustrate the bad conduct of Republicans who threaten to reduce money for emergent spending on Bosnia, poor people and water purification, while positively describing some presidential efforts to solve the political deadlock. In this way, the strategy of polarization dichotomizes the political actors into ingroup or outgroup, which functions as a powerful device legitimizing certain groups or certain points of views in mediatized discourses.

Modality

According to Fowler, the term *modality* subsumes a range of devices that indicate speakers' attitudes toward the propositions they utter. Frequent and confident judgments of validity, predictability and (un)desirability are an important part of the devices by which claims to authority are articulated and legitimated authority is expressed. Modality is signified in a range of linguistic forms: centrally, modal auxiliary verbs such as *may, shall, must* and others; sentence adverbs such as *probably, certainly* or *regrettably*; and adjectives such as *necessary, unfortunate* or *certain.* Some verbs and many nominalizations are essentially modal: *permit, predict, prove*; *obligation, likelihood, desirability, authority* (pp. 72-73).

In terms of modality, the *Times*' editorials show great confidence, especially in the propositions related to the desirable presidential strategy to solve his political crisis.

Such propositions consistently employ certain modal auxiliary verbs or sentence adverbs that connote strong validity and desirability of the suggested political strategies. For instances, "He *must* change course *decisively* and *quickly* [italics added]" (September 9, 1998), or "The crisis will *have to* [italics added] be solved at the imprecise point where legal and constitutional principles intersect" (September 12, 1998).

In contrast, the degree by which the editorials claim the predictability decreases in the propositions concerning the future behaviors of the public: for instances, "The determinative public opinion...*will probably* [italics added]...drive Congressional action" (September 12, 1998), or "The public *may* [italics added] decide that is the pragmatic course" (September 14, 1998). These examples show that the *Times* simply presuppose its democratic functions grounded upon grassroots in order to easily legitimatize their preferred points of views, although they do not know nor care about the actual public opinion very much.

Analysis of Pragmatics

No speech acts occur without the participants being assigned particular speaking or hearing roles, which may involve certain social and political roles or positions in a broader sense (Chilton & Schaffner, p. 216). The *Times*' editorials also create a sociopolitical hierarchy in which each participant, including the President, other political agents, the public and the newspaper itself, is unequally positioned mainly through representative and directive speech acts.

Representatives

When the editorials claim the truthfulness or righteousness of their arguments, they frequently make such agents as *the public*, *a majority of citizens*, *the country*, *the* *grassroots* or *we* appear. Especially, using the term *we* intends to assimilate the readers' thoughts with the speaker's positions (Chilton & Schaffner, p. 219). By presupposing that they well know the real public opinion or the needs of the public, the editorials strengthen their status as a representative of the public. An example of this is shown in the September 11 editorial: "The House of Representatives' plan to release a large portion of Kenneth Starr's report is correct because it recognizes the need for the public to reach an informed decision about President Clinton's conduct in office and his political fate." The *Times*' editorials also frequently use the results of polls as the means of claiming truth, as shown in the September 30 editorial: "the Republicans say they cannot be swayed, but the polls that indicated growing disapproval of Congress…are creating doubts…about House Speaker Newt Gingrich's refusal to consider a deal."

These kinds of representative speech acts illusionarily endow the public with an powerful status, which ironically make the readers more receptive to the editorials' positions. Thus, by pretending to be a representative of the public and presupposing its democratic function, the *Times* actually endows itself with paramount authority and legitimacy.

Directives

Through directive speech acts, the editors command the various political actors, including the President, both parties' politicians and the public, to follow their preferred solution to the scandal crisis. In such orders given, it is presupposed that a pragmatic judgment is better than other choices and the public prefers such a pragmatic course to others that might more substantive ones, as shown in the following editorial passage:

> [T]he President has to give the country room for a pragmatic judgment that does not require a societal endorsement of his pathology. The public may decide that is

> the pragmatic course in this case but such a choice should not rewrite acceptable standards of conduct for future Presidents....As for the American people, if they choose the path of limited sanction, they ought to do so with a vow of remembrance about costs of accepting a person who has Presidential scale vision but lacks character, judgment and discretion. (September 14, 1998)

While the public is given the order to support the editors' preferred pragmatic solution without any detailed explanation about what is pragmatic and why it is better, the President is given free advice by the editors about the strategies to avoid his political catastrophe. Such directive speech acts implicitly reflect the sociopolitical capital unequally distributed among the President, the editors and the public as a whole.

Commissives

Explicit commisives, promises, threats or offerings are typically made with great caution, although such speech acts are recognized idiomatically as empty (Chilton & Schaffner, p. 220). The *Times*' editors promise that the rational public opinion, as the primary guide of a democratic society, will settle the current political confusion, as shown in the following passage:

> He and we must await not only the adjudication of Congress, but the even more potent process of public deliberation. The determinative public opinion will coalesce over the next few days and it will probably catapult ahead of and drive Congressional action. (September 12, 1998)

As pointed out by Chilton & Schaffner, such a promise is empty, being based upon a political mythology of direct democracy. The readers, who are supposed to have determinative opinions but actually do not have, cannot help passively watching how omnipotent democracy will solve the problem. What the editors actually believe the public opinion is, however, is nothing but the result of polls. The September 16 editorials says,

> [T]he fact that two thirds of the people want censure and *only* [italics added] one-third favor impeachment could sway the G.O.P. toward a deal in which Mr. Clinton acknowledges his failure to faithfully execute the law.

Concluding Remarks

As an idiographic study, this study aimed at illuminating the ideological topography of American society by analyzing mediatized discourses on the Clinton-Lewinsky affair. This critical discourse analysis unveiled various ideological presuppositions inherent to media discourse and, further, the contradictions existing among different ideologies. The lexical items chosen by the *Times*' editorials reveal the contradiction between the diagnostic discourse and the prognostic discourse on the affair. Being contradictory to moralistic diagnosis, the prognostic discourse consistently expresses its preference for more politically practical solution to the affair. Although the *Times* diagnoses the affair as a national crisis, it does not provide any substantial solution, presupposing the benefits of political stability and defining change as disruptive. There are only such strategic prognoses as a grand compromise, congressional reprimands and a presidential apology that might be designed to seemingly satisfy people's probable concerns about morality.

By witnessing how the media discourses define the presidential sexual scandal and his lying under oath as a national crisis, we can identify Puritanism on one hand and legalism on the other hand, as the foundational ideologies of American society. Although everyday we consume extensive reportage of immoral sex scandals and every election we listen to politicians' lies via mass media, the media presuppose unadulterated morality and sacred Constitutional spirit as the American identities. Consistently terming the affair just the *Monica affair* or the *Lewinsky affair* and contemptuously describing the woman

Monica Lewinsky as a *star-struck woman*, the media discourses also presuppose the presidency as always deserving protection.

The strategy of polarization, relying mainly on the strategic function of legitimatization/delegitimatization, is flexibly realized through various linguistic choices in the dimensions of semantics, syntax and pragmatics, which makes the self-contradictory prognostic discourse inevitable. As a central mode of operation of ideology, claims to legitimacy may be based upon the following three types of grounds: rational grounds, traditional grounds, and charismatic grounds (Weber, in Thompson, 1990, p. 61). Mainly employing rational grounds appealing to the legality of the enacted rules like the electoral rhythm and charismatic grounds appealing to certain characters of the President, who is satisfactory as a leader although he is not personally perfect, the *Times*' editorials rationalize their politically pragmatic prognostic discourse. This pragmatic discourse seems to be founded on nationalism promoting delusive solidarity among people by identifying national interests never defined with individuals' interests.

In addition, the democratic function of politics and the mass media themselves is never questioned. The "strategic journalism," pretending to be substantive journalism, illusorily empowers the public and mythifies direct democracy and, by doing so, justifies its strategies of exclusion, its solution to the affair, and even facts. In practice, however, in the name of public opinion, there are just numerically calculated results of polls in which even the media themselves do not believe very much.

Marginally, there is found the contradiction between the public and the private. While insisting that more detailed information about the affair should be provided to the public, the media discourses criticize Kenneth Starr's detailed description of the

President's sexual activities and the Republicans' decision to broadcast the President's grand jury testimony as invasions of his right to privacy. The presupposition that the right to privacy is the most fundamental element of freedom and civilized human existence, however, is being continually violated by the desires of the mass media to expose, peer at, inquire about, and spy upon others' lives. Thus, there is an ongoing struggle between the right to privacy and the demand of commercial publicity.

As pointed out by Carragee, the editorials concentrate on assessing the success or failure of specific political strategies and tactics driven by various political actors (p. 12). As Bourdieu (1998) also argues, such exclusive attention to the political microcosm produces a break with the public, at least with those political segments of the public most concerned with the real consequences of politics on their lives and on society (p. 5).

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Struggle and consent: African American Press reception of *Gone with the Wind*

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Struggle and Consent: African American press coverage of *Gone with the Wind*

ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon critical race theory and a social-historical view of hegemony to document change within African American press reception of the motion picture *Gone with the Wind.* The African American press represents a specific marginalized discourse regarding *Gone with the Wind.* By analyzing five newspapers' coverage of the film from December 1939 through May 1940, three central phenomena are encountered. First, negative reactions to the film stemmed from segregation, which did not allow blacks to attend the Atlanta screening. These reactions also demonstrated concern among black opinion leaders that *Gone with the Wind* meant a step backward for civil rights progress. Second, positive reader response in the black press to *Gone with the Wind* complicates the black/white binary opposition approach to the study of media texts. Third, recognition of Hattie McDaniel's performance in the film confirmed progress of African Americans and led to optimism for more to come. A conclusion is drawn that this hegemonic process played out in the newspapers was one in which journalists and readers resisted, struggled, but finally accepted the film because of the recognition given to Hattie McDaniel and the interpretive performances that she and other black actors brought to their roles. *Gone with the Wind* represented for African Americans in 1940 Hollywood's promise of a new commitment toward the representation of race in American cinema.

KEY TERMS

African American press
film
Gone with the Wind
hegemony
Hollywood
journalism
representation

The motion picture *Gone with the Wind* (1939) still divides media scholars. As Thomas Schatz observes: "The most popular and commercially successful film of all time, embraced by popular historians and journalistic critics while generally reviled by 'serious' scholars and cinephiles, *Gone with the Wind* ... [is] our proverbial 800-pound gorilla - an oversized nuisance that simply won't go away, to big to be ignored and an obvious menace to our carefully constructed habitat" (Vertrees 1997, ix). With *Gone with the Wind*'s box office records still surpassing such recent Hollywood blockbusters as *Titanic* (adjusted for inflation), scholars and journalists are both able to agree on the film's commercial achievements. Yet despite the movie's success and its firm entrenchment in popular culture, few studies have considered how *Gone with the Wind* was received by the African American community upon its release in 1939.[1]

Thomas Cripps (1977) has analyzed the black protest against the aesthetic and institutional racism of American cinema and the call for an exclusively black cinema that took place prior to 1942. Cripps turned to African American newspapers of the era for evidence of these phenomena, noting that "[t]he black and liberal press were seduced by the quality of *Gone with the Wind.*" Furthermore, "Negro critics ... tacked and veered and settled dead in the water, unable to shape a common aesthetic." Indeed, this reaction by black newspapers to *Gone with the Wind* can be directly attributed to the "apparently conservative yet strangely avant-garde" nature in which race was represented in the film (pp. 363-364). Cripps (1983) contends that "the movie provided a punctuation mark between the last era [of segregation] in which racial matters were considered to be purely local and a new era when they resumed a role in national public policy" (p. 137). Through a discussion of the production of *Gone with the Wind* and the reception of the film by major black newspapers and periodicals, he concludes that the film was tailored by producer David Selznick to be palatable across a wide range of audiences, including those that were exclusively African American. Cripps (1990) also notes that the crisis that World War Two posed for the United States "temporarily drew blacks away from group nationalism and toward a revival to achieve full egalitarian citizenship" (p. 146). Cripps has been the only scholar to consider the African America community's reception of *Gone with the Wind* by analyzing African American newspapers.

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[1] Overall, there is a paucity of audience and reception studies on film because of the lack of demographic data collected on theatre goers. Indeed, more research has been conducted on production and distribution than on audience and reception (Allen 1990 pp. 351-353). Scholars have, however, used social historical approaches in order to study film reception and marginalized discourses (Eckert 1985; Dyer 1986; Haralovich 1986; Gaines 1987; Lipsitz 1990).

In this essay, I revisit Cripps' argument by providing a more detailed study concentrating specifically on black newspapers' reception of the film and recent theoretical approaches to the representation of race in the US media. This study shows how the white domination of popular culture is interpreted and resisted by marginalized groups, in this case the African American community in 1940. Without accurate records of movie house attendance, the black press may be the best available indicator of prevailing sentiment in the African American community in the United States during this era. Finkle (1975) notes that the black press, "while aiming to play a leadership role vis-a-vis the black people, printed news and editorials that found favor with the majority of black people" (p. 53). I analyze five African American newspapers' coverage of the release and subsequent news related to *Gone with the Wind* from December 1939 to May, 1940. These papers and their regional circulations[2] are the *Baltimore Afro American* (54,330),[3] the *Pittsburgh Courier* (126,962),[4] the *New York Amsterdam News* (35,841),[5] the *Chicago Defender* (82,059) and the *California Eagle* (17,600). With the exception of the *California Eagle*, the five papers received the greatest circulation of an estimated 150 African American papers being published in 1940.[6] The figures reflect regional circulation, yet overall readership was assumed to be several times larger (pp. 51, 52).

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[2] *N.W. Ayer and Son's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals*, J. Percey H. Johnson ed., Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Son, 1940.

[3] Based on June and March Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) statements.

[4] Based on June and March ABC statements.

[5] Based on September ABC statement.

[6] Between 1933 and 1940, the black press more than doubled its circulation to an estimated 1,276,000. (Finkle 1975, p. 51)

The debate over *Gone with the Wind* can easily be reduced to binary racial oppositions because the dominant discourse located within the mainstream white press lauded the film as being one of the greatest movies ever made. Conversely, the black press was highly critical of *Gone with the Wind* after its initial release. Richard Dyer sees white power as perpetually reproducing itself in popular culture "overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal" (1997 p. 10). Dyer argues that the participation of African Americans in Hollywood cinema "allows one to see whiteness as whiteness, and in this way relates to the existential psychology that is at the origins of the interest in 'otherness' as an explanatory concept in the representation of ethnicity" (1988, p. 48). Similarly, Herman Gray (1995) asserts with regard to early 1950s television programs that "black otherness was required for white subjectivity." As a result, "whites were incapable of seeing these shows and the representations they presented as offensive" (p. 75). Jane Gaines (1986) warns against the use of binary oppositions in theoretical analysis of film, arguing that it lessens the potential for understanding race and gender. Comparable to the black/white binary opposition, "[t]he male/female opposition, seemingly so fundamental to feminism, may actually lock us into modes of analysis that will continually misinterpret the position of many women" (p. 60).

A theory must be devised, then, that allows the evidence to inform us of the many possible readings of the text. As Janet Staiger observes, "meaning does not reside in the text or in the subject but within the relations between the text and a historical individual" (1986 p. 20). The struggle over representation in media texts takes place at multiple levels between and within the processes of production and reception. Janette Dates and William Barlow (1990) draw from Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony. They contend that a "war of images" has raged in US popular culture, where the creation and manipulation of black representation in the mass media is continuously challenged by forces located within and outside media institutions (p. 3). As Cripps (1990) observes, there have always been "fissures in the system which, particularly in times of social crisis, allowed for a 'play' in the wheels of commerce that enabled African Americans to protest their treatment through direct advocacy, penetrate into the classical Hollywood system, or make their own movies independently" (p. 125). Similarly, Gray (1995) asserts that this war of images is constantly being renegotiated because representations of blackness "remain contested, contradictory, and constantly mediated by the social and political circumstances and dynamics that situate them" (p. 158). The discourse contained in African American newspapers regarding *Gone with the Wind* exemplifies this resistance and negotiation in the black community against white cultural hegemony depicted within a specific Hollywood text.

By the time of *Gone with the Wind*'s theatrical release, black Americans had already experienced considerable progress in making their plea for civil rights and equality a central issue in US politics and national culture. By the 1910s African Americans had a small but powerful leadership, allowing for the formation and development of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other national organizations. These groups, combined with a national network of communication predicated on dozens of black-owned newspapers, created a formidable public voice that opposed the 1896 Supreme Court rulingthat legalized segregation, and challenged the US public to reconsider the true meaning of equality. Racial equality and equal opportunity became terms used by black leaders and journalists to call attention to the white supremacist rhetoric that defended segregation in the South. In the period leading up to the 1930s, the mainstream press and US Congress became increasingly receptive to many of the concerns voiced by African American leaders, questioning "Separate but equal" and the pronouncements of Southern leaders and legislators who argued for the continuation of such policies (Condit and Lucaites 1993, pp. 148-150; pp. 154-157).

As Cripps (1983) aptly observes, the release of *Gone with the Wind* took place at a critical juncture in world history and the history of blacks in America. The economic conditions brought about by the Great Depression made necessary a more powerful federal government in the United States. The actions of the newly elected Roosevelt administration provided the groundwork for transforming Separate But Equal into true, integrated social equality (Condit and Lucaites 1993, pp. 167-168). Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, himself a former head of the Chicago branch of the NAACP, declared in 1936 that "the day has arrived when [Negroes] are asking for a fulfillment to them of the promise of 'Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness'" (1966, p. 343). Indeed, Roosevelt was willing to include a vast array of ideas and people in his grand plan to revive the country from the Great Depression. He appointed the first woman cabinet chief, Frances Perkins, as Secretary of Labor, and staffed New Deal agencies "with professors, financiers, labor leaders, social workers, and politicos includ[ing] an unprecedented number of black professional appointments" (Sullivan 1997, p. 23). In 1935, the first black Democratic congressman, Arthur W. Mitchell, reminded African Americans that "[u]nder the New Deal you have the opportunity of a life time if you measure up to it" (Nordin 1997, p. 146).

When World War II began in Europe in 1939, many African Americans assumed an isolationist stance, arguing that blacks should not fight a "white man's war." African American newspapers recalled that black participation in World War I earned them little in the way of democracy at home. Prior to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, editorials frequently compared the US's treatment of blacks with Nazi Germany's persecution of European Jews (Dalifume 1971, p. 423, 425). As Dates (1990) notes, "World War II inexorably linked the plight of blacks in the United States to the question of race relations around the world" (p. 351). In 1941, F.D.R. declared his famous Four Freedoms in his annual address to Congress "upon which the world should be founded: freedom of speech and expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear" (Hull 1948, p. 920). After President Roosevelt proclaimed the Four Freedoms for all people of the world, including citizens of European countries under Nazi control, black newspapers requested that it be applied to black Americans, Africans, and Indians still under British colonial rule (Finkle 1975, p. 58).

While African Americans were increasingly separated economically and geographically from whites, black leaders made progress against segregation. In 1940 and 1941, US preparation for entry into the war required the wide scale use of human labor by the war industries and the armed forces. The mobilization aggravated the already clear inequities "between the promise and practice of democracy" in the US, giving further impetus to a national movement for civil rights (Sullivan 1997, p. 135). For instance, in the late spring of 1941, A. Phillip Randolph threatened a march of 100,000 on Washington if FDR did not formally ban discrimination in the war industries and armed forces. Roosevelt capitulated and the march was called off (Condit and Lucaites 1993, pp. 168-170; Bennett 1962 pp. 304-306). This action was especially important for the African American community because, "for the first time, the federal government was officially and publicly addressing the issue of racial discrimination in employment" (Sullivan 1997, p. 136).

These "cracks and fissures" in white hegemony were also apparent in popular culture throughout the 1930s. In 1933, United Artists featured Paul Robeson in *Emperor Jones*, the first Hollywood project to star an African American accompanied by whites in supporting roles. In 1936, Jesse Owens effectively debunked the Nazi theory of white supremacy by winning four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics. After Joe Louis defeated James Braddock in 1937 to become the heavyweight champion of the world, he retained his title in 1938 by defeating German boxer Max Schmeling, a symbolic victory as important as Owens' in Berlin. Louis was especially regarded by African Americans as the efflorescence of black manhood and achievement (Cowan and Maguire 1994, pp. 180, 186, 189, 191). In 1939, the acclaimed black contralto Marian Anderson was denied the opportunity to perform at Washington DC's Constitution Hall by its owners, the Daughters of the American Revolution. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt immediately resigned from the organization in protest. Harold Ickes subsequently provided for Anderson's performance at the Lincoln Memorial in front of an audience of 75,000 (Cowan and Maguire 1994, p. 193).

Although the gains of African Americans in the 1930s were significant, the United States had yet to extend the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to the black community. Vigilante terrorism was common in the South. From 1930 to 1939, there were one hundred and eleven recorded lynchings. The NAACP drafted federal anti-lynching legislation in 1933 that was introduced in Congress on several occasions from 1934. Southern Democrats and "anti-Negro Republicans," however, repeatedly prevented passage of the bill (Zinn 1966 p. 331). This same political faction continually defended segregation in the South with promises of improving the social conditions of African Americans there. They maintained that "Negroes were inferior and indifferent" and thus could not be the political and social equals of whites (Condit and Lucaites 1993, pp. 174-175). Despite this segregationist pressure, several key decisions by the Supreme Court throughout the 1930s and 1940s, combined with the new, expanded federal government, made clear the inexorable national move from segregation to greater equality for all African Americans in the United States.

While segregation was still an enforced social institution in the US at the time of *Gone with the Wind*'s release, black achievement had become a central characteristic of American political and national culture. The reception of *Gone with the Wind* by the theatre goers in the US, then, took place at a particularly tumultuous point in US history. The US's impending entrance into World War II to fight the war against fascism abroad forced government to recognize its internal contradictions of segregation and discrimination at home. It is especially in these times of political and social crisis that subordinated groups are able to make a break with past forms of hegemonic domination to demonstrate against their condition. *Gone with the Wind*'s producer, David O. Selznick, played a crucial part in creating the cracks and fissures through which the performances of Hattie McDaniel, Butterfly McQueen, Oscar Polk, and the other African American members of the film's cast would act as this very protest.

Producer David O. Selznick's legendary control over film projects exemplified his preference for "'unit' production, which allowed individual producers to devote full attention to a limited number of film projects and to perfect their own work" (Vertrees 1997, p. 6). Selznick purchased the rights to *Gone with the Wind* from author Margaret Mitchell in 1936 at the behest of his New York story editor Katherine Brown.[7] Only months before, the film producer entertained the idea of remaking D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* but decided against it because of the controversy surrounding the film.[8] Indeed, Selznick's own liberal politics played a central role in the development and interpretation of Mitchell's story. Scholars have pointed out the importance of Selznick's internal memos to scriptwriter Sidney Howard concerning *Gone with the Wind*'s interpretation of race (Behlmer 1972; Cripps 1977, 1983, 1990; Vertrees 1997).

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[7] In an interview with the author, Val Lewton Jr. (son of Val Lewton, David Selznick's west coast story editor), stated that Lewton counseled Selznick against purchasing the rights to the book because Lewton "thought it was a piece of trash," and that if Selznick was going to make an epic he should remake *War and Peace*. Vertrees (1997) also noted that Selznick's confidants vied against undertaking production of *Gone with the Wind* as a film because they believed that a Civil War epic wouldn't generate sufficient box office revenue.

[8] Many members of the African American community believed that *Gone with the Wind* was a sequel to D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* because of its reported allegiance to Mitchell's novel. James Chandler (1994) notes that "the whole cultural package, marketing strategies and all had been initially put together by and for D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, and re-deployed for sound-era epics in, for example, David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (1939), a film based on a novel that had in turn been based on Griffith's masterpiece" (p. 225). In fact, Selznick himself remarked how *Gone with the Wind* would be promoted to the same degree that Griffith's film was twenty four years earlier. Upon its release, *The Birth of a Nation*'s wide scale promotion and aesthetic perfection amounted to what blacks perceived as "a malicious conspiracy." The NAACP, concluding that *Birth* was "an undeniable attempt to picture Negroes in the worst possible light," petitioned the censorship organization that would later become the National Board of Review to deny its approval of the film. The NAACP also began criminal proceedings against Griffith and the film's distributor, Harry E. Aitken. Although the board required some changes and deletions of particularly scandalous scenes, efforts to stop the national exhibition of *Birth* ultimately failed. The film was, however, banned in certain localities such as Chicago. W.E.B. DuBois called for African Americans to counter the slanders of *Birth of a Nation* with their own cinema, music, and literature (Cripps 1971, pp. 113-117, 122-124; 1977, pp. 53-55; Staiger 1992, pp. 140-142). Griffith's film would serve as a recruitment film for the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and was revived in early 1940 with the success of *Gone with the Wind*. Harry Aitken proposed that the film be remade in sound and Technicolor. This scheme, however, was widely reported in black newspapers and abandoned amid vociferous protests by the African American community to the office of Will Hays.

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> I have already discussed this with George [Cukor, the film's original director] and he agrees - but then, our feelings are prejudiced. I refer to the Ku Klux Klan. I personally feel quite strongly that we should cut out the Klan entirely ... (A year or so ago I refused to consider remaking The Birth of a Nation, largely for this reason ... it would be rather comic to have a Jewish Kleagle; I, for one, have no desire to produce any anti-Negro film either. In our picture I think we have to be awfully careful that the Negroes come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger, which I do not think should be too difficult.) Furthermore, there is nothing in the story that necessarily needs the Klan (Behlmer 1972, p. 147).

However, there were other factors that contributed to the film's representation of race.

Information in black newspapers indicates that Selznick was under significant pressure from the NAACP with regard to the film's representation of race. Fearing another *Birth of a Nation*, black leaders took the initiative to contact Selznick while *Gone with the Wind* was in production. The *California Eagle* reported on the NAACP's meeting with scriptwriter Sidney Howard and the film's producers: "When the late Sidney Howard was adapting Margaret Mitchell's admittedly Negro-baiting novel, NAACP officials conferred with him and with producers. As a result, several scenes were omitted which might have been genuinely offensive" ("Hattie McDaniel in running," 1940). Earl J. Morris wrote in the *Pittsburgh Courier* :

> Negroes and fair-minded whites flooded Hollywood in a united front with protest letters[,] the vicious Ku Klux Klan sequences were deleted. David Selznick, the producer of 'Gone with the Wind' told ... this reporter that he would try to do all in his power to keep the picture from being offensive. Also, he sent out thousands of letters to Negroes quoting excerpts from this column, which sought to convince the public that this writer had given the picture a clean bill of sale (1940).[9]

The NAACP's strategy after its experience with *Birth of a Nation* was to prevent or alter the wide scale negative depictions of African Americans before they could be produced and circulated.[10] The treatment of race in *Gone with the Wind*, cannot by attributed solely to the unilateral decisions of Selznick, but instead involved a struggle over black representation that included the direct intervention of the NAACP.[11] Ironically the debut of Selznick's grand opus in Atlanta, Georgia was poorly reviewed in black newspapers precisely because of Atlanta's segregationist social policies: Since segregation was the law in the South, black film-goers and journalists were restricted to black theatres and the films shown in these theatres. For several weeks after *Gone with the Wind's* debut, then, the African American community was left to carefully speculate over both *Gone with the Wind*'s content and intent.

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[9] Selznick also built up *Gone with the Wind* as being of "epic" scale long before its release. In 1937, a widely publicized talent search began for an actress to play the role of Scarlett. Promotion intensified in 1939, prior to the December debut. Selznick stated that the film's "handling will have to be on a scale and of a type never before tried in the picture business. The only close approach to it would be *The Birth of a Nation*" (Behlmer 1972, p. 204).

Coverage by the black press of *Gone with the Wind*'s debut in Atlanta was characterized by a mixture of vigilance and skepticism. Since only a white audience was able to attend the screening, journalists based their insights on interpretations of the event by black community members or on reviews from the white press. The spectre of *Birth of a Nation* loomed over the extravagant event. A story in the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted the strict policy of segregation enforced at the movie's premiere and warned against possible repercussions to blacks from the film's appeal to white Southern segregationist sentiments. The report noted that "Loew's new Grand Theatre has a strictly white policy, so no Negroes were allowed to see the film." The unidentified correspondent commented that public opinion among blacks in Atlanta was that if the film "so thoroughly pleased the white South, [it] must of necessity be obnoxious to the colored South" ("Barred at film," 1939). This assumption characterized all African American press coverage concerning *Gone with the Wind*'s premiere and first run in Jim Crow theatres.

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[10] The NAACP's Harry H. Pace (1921) argued that African Americans needed to "anticipate Public Opinion [sic] and to mould and shape it so as to be sure that it does react the way we want."

[11] No reference to the NAACP's action regarding *Gone with the Wind* was found in *Papers of the NAACP: Meetings of Board of Directors, Records of Annual Conferences, etc. 1909-1950*, or issues of *The Crisis* published between 1936-1940. Articles appearing in *The Crisis* regarding media representation of African Americans during this period included Edgar Dale's "The movies and race relations" (1937) and George S. Schuyler's "Not Gone with the Wind" (1937). Dale asks, "What would be the effect of [*The Birth of a Nation*] if it were brought up to date, not only in the sound track, but also in the body of the play? What would be the effect upon attitudes if certain of the anti-Negro material in *Gone with the Wind* should be played up?" (p. 296).

Quite predictably, *Gone with the Wind*'s Atlanta debut was attended by David Selznick and the film's white stars including Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, and Olivia De Havilland but by none of the film's black cast members. The December issues of the *Chicago Defender, Pittsburgh Courier*, and *California Eagle* observed that Hattie McDaniel's performance was hailed by west coast critics at a closed door preview, noting that "[a]lthough Miss McDaniel was absent from the world premiere held in Atlanta," the actress received a telegram from Margaret Mitchell. "The telegram is as follows: 'The premiere was wonderful. During the intermission the Mayor of Atlanta called for a hand for 'our Hattie McDaniel.'" There was no mention of the theatre's policy prohibiting blacks, however, or if this was the reason for McDaniel's absence. Yet David Selznick's biographer David Thomson (1992) notes that "civic authorities in Atlanta would not allow a picture of Hattie McDaniel in the souvenir program given away at the opening." As a result of the city's policies, "McDaniel was also prevailed upon not to risk embarrassment by attending Atlanta for the festivities" (p. 322).

Because of their exclusion, black journalists were left to believe that if *Gone with the Wind* were a grandly produced romanticization of the South, then the depiction of African Americans would be without question negative. The *New York Amsterdam News* reported on the guarded and speculative mood felt in the African American community in Atlanta following the *Gone with the Wind* premiere: "[T]he 'spirit of the Old South' filled this Queen City of Dixie and left the local colored population with mixed feelings." The festivities included two monster "'Gone with the Wind balls' ... and a number of Negroes were hired to perform the services which, in those times, were done by slaves." The reporter noted that the"[i]nquiries at the Negro theatres in town as to whether the film would be brought to any of them resulted in a unanimous no! [sic]" (Bourne 1939, p. 15). Black writers showed tremendous concern about the film's alleged anti-black content. The *California Eagle* requested an "immediate telling of the true story of the siege of Atlanta in the Civil War, and the famous march that followed" because *Gone with the Wind* was "from all preliminary accounts, only too faithful to the historical falsifications of the anti Negro novel on which it is based" (Lawson 1939, p. B3).

The January 6th *Pittsburgh Courier* accused the motion picture of a biased depiction of the Reconstruction period: "Instead of glorifying the brief triumph of the blacks ... Hollywood has chosen rather to glorify the fruits and follies of oppression and the mean adventures of the historically insignificant ... Truth again has 'Gone with the Wind' ("'Gone with the Wind (editorial),'" 1940, p. 8). Similarly, William L. Patterson argued in the *Chicago Defender* that *Gone with the Wind* was "infinitely more vicious than 'The Birth of a Nation'" because "of the time at which it is launched." Patterson declared that the film's mission "is the destruction of the Emancipation Proclamation" (1940, p. 15). Similarly, the *Defender* contended that the film was "crude propaganda" in which "[t]he black man is pictured as a docile willing slave" and "black womanhood is degraded and

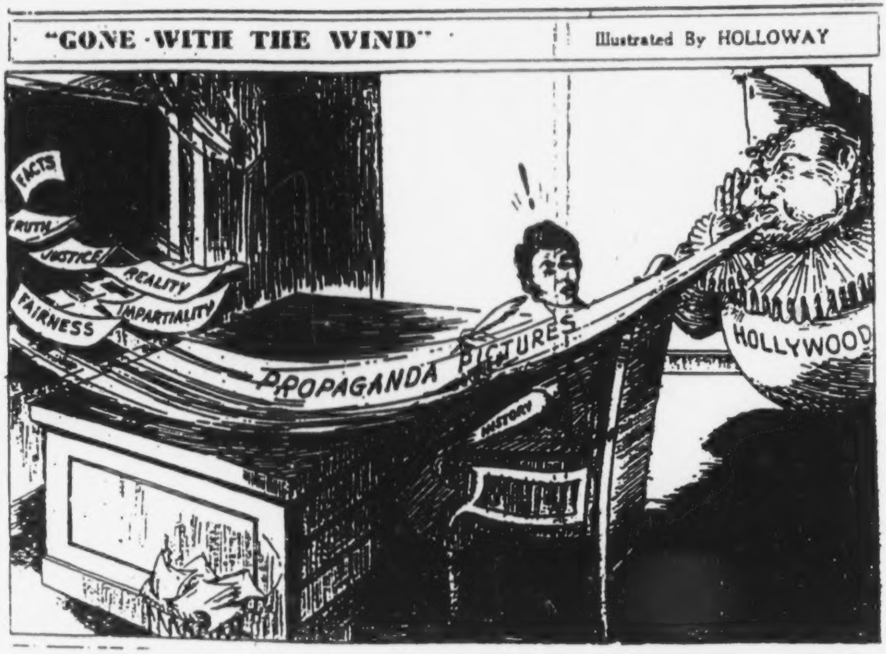
"GONE WITH THE WIND"
Illustrated By HOLLOWAY
FACTS
TRUTH
JUSTICE
REALITY
FAIRNESS
IMPARTIALITY
PROPAGANDA PICTURES
HISTORY
HOLLYWOOD

Figure I. In the case of *Gone with the Wind*, "Hollywood" is depicted by the black press as the clownish purveyor of propaganda that sweeps historical accuracy off the desk. *Pittsburgh Courier* (Holloway 1940 p. 8).

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slandered" ("'Gone with the,'" 1940). The *Defender* reprinted an editorial from *The Record Weekly* by Chicago alderman Earl Dickerson who characterized the movie as a "serpent" that would "destroy racial goodwill." In Dickerson's opinion, "'Gone with the Wind'" was the "testament of death" by "those who still beat the tom-toms of racial and sectional hate" (1940, p. 15).

Nowhere in these editorials and stories is there any indication that the authors had actually *seen* the film. Due to theatre and movie audience segregation throughout the US, the editorials were informed more by hearsay or by the contents of Mitchell's novel. As the *California Eagle* remarked after Hattie McDaniel received the Academy Award, "most of the raving and ranting of colored writers over GWTW was highly emotional and unconsidered. It is just possible that some 'reviewers' wrote their pieces after reading the book and before seeing the film" ("Hattie McDaniel," 1940). Lillian Johnson wrote in the *Baltimore Afro-American* that the pickets she passed through to attend the screening "either hadn't seen 'Gone with the Wind' or they were attempting to be misleading" with the extreme accusations regarding the film on their picket signs (1940 p. 13). However, as letters from readers who had seen *Gone with the Wind* began to appear in the editorial pages the confused discourse concerning the motion picture's representation of race became more readily apparent.

The struggle over explication and meaning that finally permeated the discourse concerning *Gone with the Wind* in the black press is exemplified in Dany Burley's review in the *New York Amsterdam News*. Alongside claims that the film is "anti Negro propaganda" that "represents the pus oozing from beneath the scab of a badly healed wound," Burley lauds Hattie McDaniel who "performs most brilliantly and convincingly and 'steals' with consummate ease nearly every scene she is shown in" (1940, p. 16). Actor and writer Clarence Muse immediately recognized the unusual nature of the black performers' interpretations of their characters. In his column in the *Chicago Defender* on December 23, 1939, he noted that "three Negro artists finished 'neck and neck' with the 'stars.' Hattie McDaniel ... Butterfly McQueen ... and that great Broadway actor Oscar Pope [sic]." Muse went on to implore his readers to support *Gone with the Wind*'s black cast members: "Please give these fellow craftsmen all the praise you can, they are victims like you of the American habit of Uncle Tom" (1940, p. 21).

Cripps (1983) notes that the African American newspapers, "[a]s though accommodating the breadth of the spectrum ... sometimes balanced hostile critics by running their columns in tandem with friendlier observers" (p. 146). For instance, just one week after its scathing editorial condemning *Gone with the Wind*, the *Pittsburgh Courier* included a glowing review titled, "Nothing in film for race to feel ashamed to see." Instead of finding flaws in the film's representations of African Americans, the reviewer laments "the representatives of the Old South [who] were brought to life again in the pompous glory of a people too blind to see the handwriting on the wall." The article praised the performances of the black actors, noting that they represented "a new trend in screen entertainment" (Rowe 1940 p. 21).

A pictorial of the African American cast members of *Gone with the Wind* titled "They help to re-create history amid colorful, dramatic settings of 'GWTW'" was featured on the same page with the *Courier*'s favorable review. Clearly, many African Americans who were able to see the film readily perceived those cracks and fissures in Hollywood's white cultural hegemony. A letter to the editor of the *Courier* was highlighted, asking that the newspaper initiate "a letter writing campaign among Negroes to write Selznick Studios praising the work of Miss Hattie McDaniels [sic] ... demand[ing] that she receive the Supporting Player Academy Award for 1939 ... It will mean more and better roles for Negroes in major film productions" (Lawrence 1940, p. 11). The actual letter writing campaign to Hollywood that ensued after the publication of this letter demonstrates the wide scale support of McDaniel in the African American community less than two months after the film's Atlanta premiere.

Commenting on the representation of race and the diverse opinions concerning *Gone with the Wind* in the black press, the *California Eagle* observed that "a Negro romantic team would appear ludicrous in a major production not only to white audiences but to Negroes themselves" because "Hollywood had not yet allowed the Negro an opportunity to run the gamut of human emotions" (Fentress 1940 p. B1). Yet the *Eagle* noted that Hollywood columnists were already hailing McDaniel for "turn[ing] in the most finished piece of acting in the Selznick super production" ("Hattie McDaniel in running," 1940). And, as if preparing its readers for another bout featuring Joe Louis, the *Baltimore Afro-American* ran a picture of McDaniel under the heading "She's on the Ballot," noting McDaniel's Oscar nomination as "the first time that a member of her race has ever been mentioned for such an honor" ("Best of the," 1940). In the *Chicago Defender* the same week, Clarence Muse reiterates verbatim his initial review of the film, while adding that even though the film "is dangerous propaganda ... Hattie McDaniel has been nominated for the Academy Award and she should win it" (1940, p. 21).

At first skeptical then highly critical of *Gone with the Wind*, the African American press moderated its stance with positive reviews about the motion picture. In this way, the newspapers accomodated their readers' overall positive responses to the film, as the printed readers from letter attest. In fact, no negative letters concerning *Gone with the Wind* were observed in the newspapers reviewed for this analysis. Instead, the black community appeared to rally around Hattie McDaniel as the next great black achiever. Her Oscar in early March almost completely silenced further criticism of *Gone with the Wind* from African American journalists and editors. Black newspapers were unanimous in their positive coverage of Hattie McDaniel's Academy Award for best supporting actress in *Gone with the Wind*.

To the disappointment of some black observers, *Gone with the Wind* did not depict slave rebellion or retribution for the injustices of slavery. But, as Donald Bogle (1989) points out, "the really beautiful aspect of this film was not what was omitted but what was ultimately accomplished by the black actors who transformed their slaves into complex human beings" (p. 88). Similar sentiments were frequently expressed in the African American press following McDaniel's receiving the Oscar. The *California Eagle* proclaimed that "Hattie McDaniel has hoisted the standing of Negro motion picture artists several notches as a result of GWTW" ("Hattie McDaniel," 1940). The *Pittsburgh Courier* reminded its readership of the role it played in McDaniel's achievement, since readers "flooded Hollywood with letters on behalf of Miss McDaniel after Bill Lawrence of Los Angeles had made a direct appeal" (Morris 1940, p. 20). The *Amsterdam News* announced the film's Harlem debut and included a cartoon (Figure II) depicting a carpetbagger figure labeled "prejudice" fleeing South. A document in the foreground

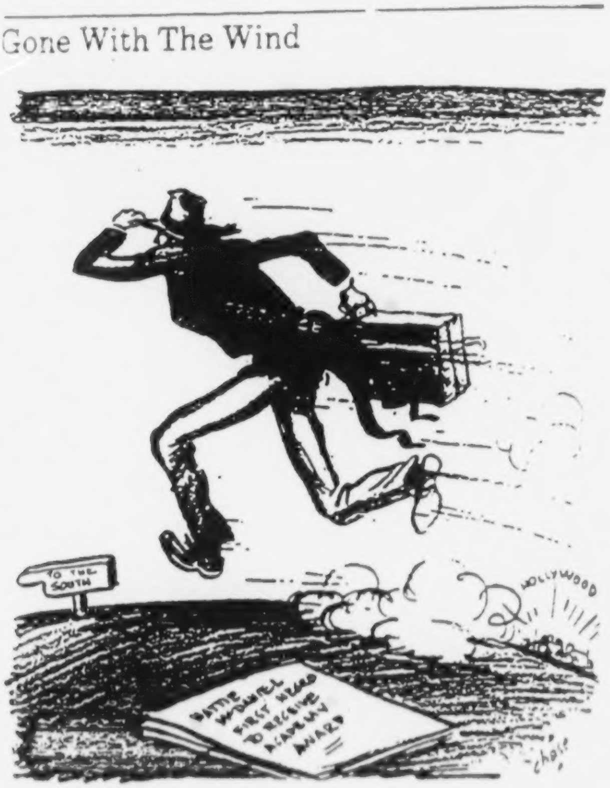
Gone With The Wind
TO THE SOUTH
HOLLYWOOD
HATTIE McDANIEL FIRST NEGRO TO RECEIVE ACADEMY AWARD
Chase

Figure II. "Gone with the Wind" cartoon depicting the carpetbagger "Prejudice" heading "to the South" after having learned of McDaniel's Academy Award. *New York Amsterdam News*, (Chase 1940, p. 12).

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explains: "Hattie McDaniel first Negro to receive Academy Award" (Chase, 1940). Clarence Muse summed up the mood of the black community concerning McDaniel's Oscar when he wrote in the *Chicago Defender*: "As Marian Anderson stood beside the statue of Abraham Lincoln pouring out songs from her soul in Washington, Hattie McDaniels [sic] stood in silence and accepted the token, which says to the world that as a supporting artist she is Hollywood's best" (1940 p. 11).

In the wake of McDaniel's achievement, journalists reflected and, in some instances, recanted their previous statements concerning the film. In his column appearing in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, Earl J. Morris acknowledged his initial skepticism regarding *Gone with the Wind*: "With all the heat that I, along with other sepia writers and organizations, put on 'Gone with the Wind,' Hattie McDaniel got in there and pitched" (1940, p. 20). The *California Eagle* chastised black writers for having "blasted and bellowed against the film" when "[o]nly the most sensitive could have been disturbed by the film's treatment of interracial themes" ("Hattie McDaniel," 1940). Similarly, Lillian Johnson wrote in the *Afro American* of the "times when we of the darker race are so sensitive about the prejudices and the insults that we meet so often that we lose insight of our objective and with it our sense of evaluation of wrongs and rights" (1940 p. 13).

Letters from readers indicated the various ways in which *Gone with the Wind* was received by film-goers. Correspondence was frequently laudatory of the performances of African Americans in the film. The *Afro American* printed a letter from a reader who attended a screening with a "jim crow" white audience in Baltimore: "I felt proud when the acting of Hattie McDaniel ... brought hearty laughs or heartfelt tears to the eyes of many in the audience ... I heard as many favorable comments for the colored actors as for the white actors." The reader then wanted to assess responses of white and black audiences by seeing the film again in Harlem (Johnson 1940 p. 13). The *New York Amsterdam News* cited Loew's theatre chain administrator Oscar A. Doob, who was perplexed by the criticism *Gone with the Wind* received from the African American community: "I saw the picture in Atlanta and noted the applause the Negro players got from that audience down there. The picture treats both races on an equal plane, showing up the whites in a more distasteful manner than it could possibly do to the fine colored performers in its cast" ("McDaniel award shows," 1940).

The editors of the *Amsterdam News* exclaimed that McDaniel "had at least as much to do with making 'Gone' the outstanding movie of 1939 as anybody in the cast." The editorial made clear the hope that McDaniel's success would call to Hollywood's attention the aptitudes of all black performers capable of "run[ing] the whole gamut of acting - from light comedy to heavy drama" ("She broke the ice," 1940). McDaniel's achievement was recognized as another example of "'just how liberal and broadminded the American people are becoming toward one another in these trying times when races, religions and political beliefs are being lined up against each other,'" noted Loew's Oscar Doob ("McDaniel award shows," 1940). Doob was in Harlem to promote *Gone with the Wind*'s debut at Loew's Victoria Theatre April 4th. An advertisement appearing in the *Amsterdam News* for the film's Harlem premiere offered advanced ticket sales of reserved seats to "[s]ee Hattie McDaniel in the role which won her the Academy Award for best performance of the year" ('Gone with the,' 1940).

Indeed. the debut of *Gone with the Wind* in Harlem was comparable to the film's Atlanta premiere in December. The *Amsterdam News* reported that "[n]umerous Hotels and restaurants are planning 'GWTW' Southern dinners for the night of the opening" of the film ("Harlem ready for," 1940). Announcing that Oscar Polk would attend the Harlem debut, the newspaper noted the "festive air about the neighborhood that threatens to equal the excitement coincident with the Atlanta premiere of GWTW" ("Oscar Polk set," 1940). Coverage of the Harlem event in Chicago, however, wondered whether African Americans would react negatively to *Gone with the Wind* in Harlem. The *Chicago Defender* informed its readers of the "worry over what reaction the showing will have on the Race patrons," who would attend the Harlem premiere. The article notes that "[t]housands of Race folk hav[ing] witnessed its showing on Broadway" but asks if African Americans will choose "to have it come into their very backyards?" ("Harlem is divided," 1940).

The April 13 *Amsterdam News* reported that the "misgivings on the part of producers and booking agents that Harlem would react to [Gone with the Wind] violently were unjustified as the community went to see for itself what it was all about." Below a photo of a scene from the film wherein "Vivien Leigh giv[es the] family watch to faithful Pork," the brief report noted that "Harlem felt the picture showed a true stage in the development of the South and of the US" while "the scenes showing Negro slaves were necessary to the portrayal of Miss Mitchell's story" ("'GWTW' drew well," 1940). Despite the ominous forecast of Harlem audiences reacting negatively, the film's premiere was a tremendous success

Shortly after McDaniel received the Academy Award, news emerged about plans for a remake of *The Birth of a Nation*. Even as the dialogue in the African American press concerning *Gone with the Wind* turned more favorable in the wake of McDaniel's success, black writers attributed the resurgence of interest in *The Birth of a Nation* to the success of *Gone with the Wind*. Film producer Harry E. Aitken, who originally circulated *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, sought to cash in on the popularity of *Gone with the Wind* by distributing the original version of *The Birth of a Nation* for exhibition at selected theatres. The *Courier* proclaimed that the "[s]uccess of 'Gone with the Wind' [has] give[n] new life to 'Birth of a Nation,'" as the "[r]evival of 'The Birth of a Nation' and its remaking in Technicolor and sound as a sequel to 'Gone with the Wind' were announced ..." The report noted that the theme of the Ku Klux Klan "was only lightly touched on in 'Gone with the Wind.'" and that "[t]he success of 'The Birth of a Nation' is said to be chiefly responsible for the decision to remake the picture in Technicolor and sound ... Mr. Aitken admitted [that] the popularity of 'Gone with the Wind'" was also a deciding factor ("Success of 'Gone,'" 1940).

Editors of the African American newspapers vigorously protested the idea of remaking *The Birth of a Nation* In the *Afro American*, Ralph Matthews gravely asserted: "We were afraid something like this would happen - we mean that the success of 'Gone with the Wind' would give rise to a series of pictures on the struggle between the North and the South ... already Hollywood is busy making plans to revive 'The Birth of a Nation.'" In supporting a letter petition begun by the NAACP regarding the proposed remake of *The Birth of a Nation*, Matthews concluded with the request that readers write to Film Production Code executive Will Hays and if they could not write a letter, "simply cut out this editorial and send him this" (1940, p. 13).

The *Pittsburgh Courier* noted shortly thereafter that the office of Will Hays, the Hays Office, responded to the re-issue of the 1915 *The Birth of a Nation* with a public pronouncement that its tour "'has not been great and we have had practically no comment from the public.'" However, according to the reports in the newspapers, the NAACP was steadfast in its petition against the continued distribution of the film. On April 27, the *Courier* announced a victory in the letter-writing campaign protesting the *The Birth of a Nation* remake, noting that after three more national organizations formally protested the project, "Governor Carl E. Milliken of the Hays [O]ffice has replied that he knows of no intention on the part of a responsible company to produce a sound version at the present time" and added that "'The Birth of a Nation,' could not at the present time, be approved by our Production Code Administration without very far-reaching changes" ("Proposed plan to," 1940). Thus, as in the case of the *Gone with the Wind* production, shelving of the *Birth of a Nation* project was at least partially the result of the collective effort of the NAACP and black newspapers that acted to prevent negative depictions of race before they could be circulated in the media.

Conclusion

The economic and cultural dominance of Hollywood in the 1930s dictated a filmmaking process where white culture was normalized and "black otherness was required for white subjectivity" (Dyer, 1997; Gray 1995, p. 75). *Gone with the Wind* "allowed for a 'play' in the wheels of commerce" where black performers like Hattie McDaniel "penetrate[d] into the classical Hollywood system" to protest the compromised roles in which they were all too routinely cast (Cripps 1990, p. 125). The African American press demonstrates this resistance to white cultural hegemony and struggle for interpretation of race representation concerning *Gone with the Wind.* The black newspapers criticized *Gone with the Wind* upon its debut because of its alleged negative portrayal of African Americans, but reconsidered their stance in the wake of objections from black readership and the film industry's approval of Hattie McDaniel.

Representation of race in the popular media is characterized by black resistance to white cultural hegemony. This struggle takes place between forces operating at the points of production and reception both within media industries and at the larger societal and cultural level. Mainstream newspapers' uncritical praise for *Gone with the Wind* stemmed from their inability to see whiteness as anything but "normal" and black otherness as necessary for white subjectivity. Discourse in African American newspapers characterized a hegemonic process wherein black writers and readers resisted, struggled, but finally accepted the film because of the complex interpretive performances that black performers brought to their roles. The proposed remake of *Birth of a Nation* was successfully resisted by African Americans while *Gone with the Wind* came to represent Hollywood's tentative promise of a new commitment toward the representation of race in American cinema.

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American journalism vs. the poor, a research review and analysis

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American journalism vs. the poor, a research review and analysis

Critics argue American journalism misrepresents the poor as behaviorally-flawed people and fails to draw a connection between poverty and the political economic system. This has implications for public perception, behavior and policy toward the poor. A review and analysis of the available research shows that the misrepresentation has held true historically and contemporarily, though contradictions are also evident. Much is missing from the available research, including appropriate connections to other areas of mass communication scholarship.

American journalism vs. the poor, a research review and analysis

Introduction

In *The war against the poor*, sociologist Herbert J. Gans argues that America has been waging war against poor people. The war is conducted through denial of job and educational opportunities, sometimes through physical violence and through other fronts. Gans focuses on the front involving labels "that stereotype, stigmatize, and harass the poor by questioning their morality and their values" (Gans, 1). Gans says this labeling – from the antiquated "paupers" and "vagrants" to the contemporary "undeserving" and "underclass" – falsely blames the poor "for the ills of the American society and economy, reinforces their mistreatment, increases their misery, and further discourages their moving out of poverty" (Gans, 1, 2).

While Gans implicates social scientists and politicians as participants in this labeling, he points his finger mostly at news media. For example, he says the term "underclass" traces its origins to economist Gunnar Myrdal's *Challenge to affluence*. *Time* magazine brought the term into the public vocabulary, associating it with "a large group of people who are more intractable, more socially alien, and more hostile than almost anyone had imagined" (Gans, 31-32). The term was then adopted by other media agencies, further establishing its presence in our national dialogue.

Since that time, the portrayal of the underclass has become more specific. Gans argues that the term underclass has become a behavioral definition of poverty, connoting school dropouts who do not work, young women who have babies out of wedlock and go on welfare, the homeless and panhandlers, alcohol and drug addicts and "street criminals" (Gans, 2). But, more than that, the behavioral definition confuses cause and effect, proscribing poverty as a result of these behavior rather than these behaviors as a result of poverty.

What Gans describes as a behavioral definition, is not necessarily new, despite that the specific terms may have changed. Jennings writes that, "Historically, poor people have been perceived as lazy, immoral, or, to use a term historian Michael B. Katz utilizes in one of his books, 'undeserving' ... impoverishment has in this country been generally associated with lack of morals, sin, and vice" (Jennings, 14).

The term underclass also specifically connotes African Americans, despite the fact that white people falling below the federal government's poverty level is more than two and half times the number of black people who fall below this level (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 477).[1] Hacker writes that "neither sociologists nor journalists have shown much interest in depicting poor whites as a 'class.' ... For whites, poverty tends to be viewed as atypical or accidental. Among blacks, it comes closer to being seen as a natural outgrowth of their history and culture" (Hacker, 106). According to the 1977 *Time* article that Gans refers to, the group of intractable, socially alien and hostile people consisted "mostly of impoverished urban blacks who still suffer from the heritage of slavery" (Gans, 32).[2]

As recently as 1996, research has provided further evidence that media misrepresent the poor as largely African American. In a study of poverty coverage by

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[1] As of March 1997, 28.4 percent of America's black population, or 9.7 million people, lived below the official poverty line compared to 11.2 percent of the white population, or 24.7 million people (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 477). The Hispanic population is also disproportionately represented – 29.4 percent, or 8.7 million people.

Time, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* from 1988 through 1992, Gilens found that 62 percent of 560 people presented in pictures with stories about poverty were African American (Gilens, 521). Data from the U.S. Census Current Population Survey for 1990 showed that African Americans were 29 percent of the nation's poor during this time period (Gilens, 516). Furthermore, in a random sample of ABC, CBS and NBC newscasts during 1988-1992, Gilens found that 65.2 percent of those presented as poor were African American (Gilens, 527).

While Gans makes a causal leap between portrayals of the poor and subsequent public perception and public policy, Gilens draws upon existing media effects and agenda-setting research to provide evidence for the causal connection:

> Media content can affect the importance viewers attach to different political issues (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Rogers and Dearing 1988), the standards that they employ in making political evaluations (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Krosnick and Kinder 1990), the causes they attribute to national problems (Iyengar 1989, 1991), and their issue positions and perceptions of political candidates (Bartels 1993). (Gilens, 528).

Gilens specifically discusses Iyengar and Kinder's experiment which found that when shown news broadcasts about unemployment which included depictions of whites as unemployed, 71 percent of white subjects identified unemployment as among the nation's three most important problems. Shown news broadcasts that depicted black people as unemployed, 53 percent of white subjects identified unemployment as among the nation's three most important problems (Gilens, 528).

Taken together, Gans, Jennings, Hacker, and Gilens describe a certain social construction of poverty that may impact not only beliefs about the poor, but also

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[2] Quotes taken from, "The American underclass: destitute and desperate in the land of plenty." *Time*, 29 August 1977: 14-17.

government and societal response to poverty. Gans writes that when the poor are thought of as morally deficient, "The political chances of reviving effective antipoverty policy are also reduced, since politicians or voters are rarely prepared to spend public money for people who do not deserve help" (Gans, 1-2).

The argument put forth by these authors is that if poverty is represented in mass media as arising from undesirable cultural attributes, individual character flaws, and instances of individual bad luck or bad decision making of the people who live in poverty, rather than as a problem arising from collective economic, political, and social policy decisions, then the policies most likely to be introduced as well as the most likely to gain popular support will be ones which attempt to combat poverty based upon individual factors rather than on societal factors. Historically in America, this has largely held true as policies directed at helping the poor often operate on the "continuing assumption that the existing economic system needs no fundamental alterations" and that, for example, blame "the unemployed worker for his level of skills and unemployability" (Jennings, 22, 27). Additionally, if poverty is portrayed in mass media as "a black problem," rather than as a problem of all Americans, white Americans are not as likely to be concerned about poverty, as the Iyengar and Kinder results illustrate.

This discussion raises larger questions for journalism researchers, educators and working journalists. Many journalists would probably take exception with the idea that they are guilty of harming or misrepresenting the poor. American journalists often think of themselves as champions of the underdog and the downtrodden. But, is this a realistic and accurate view for journalists to hold, or is this just rhetoric masking journalists' true involvement in "the war against the poor"? The purpose of this paper is to further explore this question by examining research on journalistic coverage of poverty and the poor, both in historical and contemporary contexts.

Before reviewing and analyzing the available research on journalism and poverty, this paper presents a brief discussion of attempts to define poverty. This discussion further explicates the importance of examining journalistic coverage of poverty. The research review and analysis begins with works that can be used to illustrate the ideological framework American mainstream journalism operates under. This framework provides a contextual base for considering the subsequent research presented which covers the often contradictory response of journalism to poverty, the role of journalism in formation of public policy concerning poverty, journalism's portrayal of individual poverty issues such as homelessness, and journalism's role in the creation of "monolithic poverty." The paper closes with a discussion addressing issues and themes largely overlooked in the available research.

Elusive Poverty

For much of American history, poverty has had no exact definition. Since the 1960s, though, America has had two primary definitions of poverty: the precise, formulaic, official, "absolute" definition used by government, politicians, various agencies, and some social scientists; and the unofficial, imprecise, nonformulaic, "relative" definition more often invoked by advocates of the poor, some social scientists, and the poor themselves.

The official definition originated in 1963 with Mollie Orshansky, a Department of Agriculture employee. Using survey results of American consumption patterns, she determined that a typical "four-person, non-farm, family consumed approximately one third of its annual income on food" (Jennings, 11). She then determined the income required to purchase food and multiplied that by three to model an "Economy Food Plan." Despite the fact that the data used were from an almost 10-year-old survey and that "by 1965 the proportion of family income spent on food consumption was much less than one third," the Council of Economic Advisors adopted this plan in 1964 as the "poverty level" and with slight modifications it has been used ever since as the official measure of American poverty (Jennings, 11).

The official definition has the serious flaw of grossly underestimating the extent of poverty in America. For example, in 1977 "multiplying the Economy Food Plan by a factor of 3.4 rather than three [a suggestion made by Orshansky] ... would have resulted in an additional 25 million Americans being officially defined as living in poverty" (Jennings, 12). Even some government agencies don't abide by the official measure. Currently, the U.S. Bureau of Census uses an index of 125 percent of poverty level to demarcate what it calls "near poverty level" (Jennings, 12; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 477). Food Stamp eligibility is based on 130 percent of poverty level and Medicaid on 133 percent (Jennings, 12).[3]

The other definition of poverty is the unofficial, "relative definition," which does not involve formulas and percentages. In 1958, Galbraith wrote that "People are poverty-stricken when their income, even if adequate for survival, falls markedly behind that of the community...they cannot wholly escape, therefore, the judgment of the larger community that they are indecent" (Galbraith, 251). Though this definition is largely psychological in nature, it may still involve a struggle to meet minimum subsistence standards. In addition, Greider argues that the relative poor are often disadvantaged by the official definition of poverty. He writes that, "The unintended effect of the federal government's so-called 'poverty line' is to obscure the existence of the vast pool of struggling families who are above the line – the officially 'nonpoor' – and to push them out of the political equation" (Greider, 198).

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[3] Eligibility requirements as of 1994

The discussion of these definitions is meant to highlight the fallacy involved in relying upon the official poverty line when considering the importance of journalistic discourse on poverty. The poor are not a small, unimportant segment of the population; in fact, they represent a much larger segment of the population than the official measure would allow us to believe. Using the Census Bureau's 125 percent cut-off, 49.3 million Americans – 18.5 percent of the population – lived at or below the "near poverty level" as of March 1997 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 477).[4] To better appreciate that even this figure may be low, the near poverty level for a family of four translates to an annual income of $20,045, or about $5,000 per family member. In recent years, Americans living at or below near poverty level has reached as high as 20 percent.

Ideological Underpinnings of American Journalism

Research on the historical intersection between poverty and journalism highlights an ideological struggle which has taken place within journalism since the era of the penny press. The research reveals that journalists from the penny press era forward have remained concerned over the presence of poverty, have continually "exposed" or "discovered" the existence of poverty, and have debated both causes and solutions.

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[4] Using the stricter, official poverty level measure, the numbers are still extraordinary. As of March 1997, 36.5 million Americans lived in official poverty. For a family of four, this translates to an annual income of $16,036 or less.

Within this debate has been the struggle over ideology. The struggle can be epitomized by its extreme ends: the belief on one end that the remedy for poverty can only be found through capitalism, and the belief on another other end that the remedy for poverty can be found only through an alternate political economy such as socialism.

Taylor examined the ideological conflict underlying "a superficial agreement" between Horace Greeley and Karl Marx when Marx served as the London correspondent for Greeley's *New York Tribune* from 1851 to 1862. Both were concerned about issues of poverty, but differed on solutions. Greeley viewed capitalism and the Industrial Revolution as a chance to bring prosperity to the poor, while Marx's arguments for an end to capitalist led to his eventual dismissal from the paper. While Marx worked to incite anger, Greeley worked to evoke sympathy for the "downtrodden masses."

The defense of capitalism, even in the face of evidence of damaging consequences, is a reoccurring theme in the literature. Waller-Zuckerman's work on the writings of Vera Connolly from the 1920s through the 1950s provides an example of a journalist who, through her work on the horrific poverty and other conditions of Native American reservations, called for reforms within the bounds of the existing capitalistic structure. In fact, during the Depression era "Connolly called for preservation and expansion of the free enterprise system that had always worked for America" while stressing themes of "enterprise, initiative, fierce competition and hard work plus faith in American business."

The research also contains tales of journalists who, unlike Connolly, could not defend capitalism once they gained firsthand knowledge of the realities of poverty. Henry's article on Helen Campbell tells how she was radicalized through her work for the *New York Tribune* in 1886 and 1887. Writing about the lives of working women in New York City slums, Campbell went from offering solutions of poverty that were based on educating the poor and on individual acts of charity by the well-to-do to an eventual embrace of socialism as a way of changing the political economic structure of society. The *Tribune* initially accompanied her articles with glowing commentaries, but grew increasingly negative toward her and her views, dismissing them as coming from someone who was "naive" and not "well-advised," as she radicalized.

Miraldi's monograph on muckraker Charles Edward Russell also suggests that Russell's radicalization resulted from being sent into "pockets of poverty" and being exposed to other drawbacks of the capitalistic system during his career beginning in 1881. Like Campbell and muckraking contemporary Upton Sinclair, Russell too would embrace socialism.[5]

A good body of work exists within journalism history literature on the "dissident," "radical," "alternative" and "underground press." This work suggests that journalists on the ideological end that believes a solution for poverty cannot be found within capitalism have traditionally been pushed out of the "mainstream" press or have chosen not to enter it, partly because they believed the mainstream press "perpetuates class rule" (Buchstein, 66). This work examines alternative journalism from the 1800s through the 1960s (Buchstein; Kessler; Shore; Roberts; Glessing; Leamer; Lewis).

Not all the debate over ideology has been between the ends of the political spectrum, but sometimes each end has had internal wranglings. On the alternative end, Seeger's examination of the *Berkeley Barb* demonstrates an ideological conflict within the 1960s alternative press which occurred when dissident journalists' unrealistic and romanticized visions of the poor conflicted with the reality they sometimes saw when they came into actual contact with the poor.

Cronin's article on *The New England Magazine* from 1889 to 1901 describes a reform paper that did not push socialism, but rather argued for government to improve housing, education, industrial conditions and municipal services while attempting to present poverty as a result of environmental conditions rather than personal characteristics of the poor. In addition, the paper promoted Christian values, reminding its readers of their responsibilities to help others.

On the mainstream end, Illouz examined a more contemporary presentation of poverty. She found in 1984, the "elite" *New York Times* more often portrayed the poor as only the homeless and within that focused on women, children, blacks, and the elderly despite the fact that according to "data published the same year by *The New York Times*, 66 percent of homeless people were men." The "popular" *USA Today*, on the other hand, more often portrayed the poor as "the hungry." Both papers explained poverty as being a problem of people traditionally disconnected from "participation in the process of production," thus overlooking the presence of poverty among working people.

The difference that emerged between the two papers was that *USA Today* placed responsibility for poverty on the poor themselves ("laziness, the inability to take care of themselves and refusal to accept the assistance offered by the city") and on situational factors, while *The New York Times* cited situational factors ("unemployment, shortage of moderate rents, decrease of federal allotment of funds and increase in the number of

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[5] For an introductory primer on muckraking research literature, see

people eligible, Reagan's social policy, an apathetic public and psychiatric deinstitutionalization") almost exclusively. The fact that neither paper focused on structural factors – the political economic system – is similar to Cabell's findings in an analysis of articles and editorials about welfare during the 1970s in *The New York Times* and *New York Daily News*. She found both papers' coverage "rendered invisible the structural connections between the problems of poverty and welfare and the functioning of the economic and political systems."

Victims and Victim Blaming

The discussion of the Illouz piece brings into focus the contradictory response of American mainstream journalism to poverty. Often, journalism responds to poverty simply by ignoring it. Ryan and Owen examined coverage of social issues in eight newspapers in March 1975 and found that "poverty and welfare" received the second lowest amount of coverage across the papers (0.3 percent of the news stories) among nine sub-issues (drug abuse was lowest). When poverty is covered, though, journalists often attempt to evoke sympathy for the poor, a practice which can be traced as far back as Horace Greeley (see discussion of Taylor's article on page 8). On the other hand, in the often unconscious defense of capitalism, journalists portray the poor as being responsible for their situation. On the one hand, the poor are seen as victims, but on the other, they are seen as responsible for their victimization. Thus, in Illouz's study she found *The New York Times* portraying the homeless as women, children, blacks, and the elderly – people who traditionally have been seen as either weak and unable to defend themselves or otherwise as victims of society. At the same time, she found *USA Today* portraying the poor themselves as the parties responsible for poverty.

A constant portrayal of the poor as traditional victims may lead the public to perceive the poor the same way even when counterbalancing evidence is introduced. Agar analyzed Michael Harrington's 1987 *Washington Post* article, "The Invisible Poor: White Males," by having a college class read the article and submit written responses to it. He found despite Harrington's attempt to show poverty as a function of the political economy – by focusing on white male poverty rather than on traditional "victims" along gender and ethnic/racial lines – the respondents did not grasp this, but instead characterized white males as a "new group" among the poor.

Another work which discusses journalistic presentations of the poor as victims is Dahlin's analysis of books, newspapers, magazines and other sources' "discovery" of poverty as a problem among the elderly at the turn of the century, a discovery that would eventually lead to the creation of the Social Security program in the 1930s. The individual responsibility, or what sociologists call "blaming the victim," tactic is also discussed in Wright's article, in which she notes that among the explanations offered for why the media cite individual responsibility as the cause of poverty is corporate media owners desires to present views favorable to their interests, audience expectations, and journalists' inability to understand complex social science arguments.

Researching the television documentary "Harvest of Shame," Schaefer found that a debate emerged between those on the production staff who wanted to leave viewers with an emotional response of sympathy toward migrant farm workers, and those, led by Edward R. Murrow, who wanted the program to end with a call for political action. The groups shared the vision of leaving viewers with the sense that the workers were victims of a system that left them powerless, impoverished, and living in deplorable conditions.

Journalism and Public Policy Toward Poverty

Murrow's vision for Harvest won out, illuminating another dimension of journalism's coverage of poverty and public response to the coverage. Schaefer writes that after Harvest aired, an upset pubic did indeed call for political action. The call did not result in any meaningful improvements for the workers, partly because the production staff chose to present then contemporary images of squalor, accompanied by short sound bites from migrants on one side and their employers on the other.

Though Schaefer does not spell this out explicitly, the reliance on "two-sided sound bites" and "contemporary images" represents aspects of the news-documentary method which trace their origins to print news media. These conventions of journalism, whether in print or broadcast, lead to an ignoring of the structural forces which can govern people's lives. Though it may not have been conscious, the produces of Harvest were constrained from placing blame for the horrid lives of the migrants on the larger political economic system, but rather placed it only on the growers, divorced from the system within which the growers operate.

The results of "Harvest of Shame" are similar to the results Parmenter discusses in his article on Sinclair's *The Jungle*, which first appeared in serialized form in *Appeal to reason*, a socialist newspaper (Shore). Sinclair had intended the book to be a call for socialism by showing how capitalism's drive for runaway profits hurt the average citizen and led to deplorable working conditions for the poor. The ideological response, in this case from the public and other news media, was to call for reform within the current political economic structure. Thus, what resulted was a push for pure food and drug laws, but not legislation which would improve conditions for the workers.

Despite these examples, a number of researchers have found examples of news coverage of poverty which have resulted in benefits for the poor, even if the coverage did not portray poverty as a result of the political economy. McMurray notes that during a fact-finding tour with Sen. Robert Kennedy, hunger was "discovered" by television and newspapers for the first time since the Depression era in 1967 when poverty in general was receiving increased attention. The media attention waned after a few years, but not before Congress expanded food assistance programs.

With help from the "hunger lobby," hunger returned to the spotlight in 1981 in media coverage of the Reagan administration's battles with Congress over the food-aid budget. The image of the hungry changed during this time, expanding from "welfare families" to the "new poor" – members of the working class – and eventually to the homeless. The government first responded by giving away surplus cheese and later other surplus food which were "funneled to food banks and soup kitchens."

Similarly, Walsh-Childers found that a package of stories by the *Alabama Journal* in 1987 on infant mortality eventually led to the state legislature appropriating additional funds for Medicaid so that an additional 30,000 pregnant women and their babies came under coverage, and the amount doctors received from Medicaid for delivery increased from $425 to $1700. The Department of Health also received additional funds to set up prenatal care services in 20 counties, and a community alliance group in one county set up its own non-profit clinic for low-income pregnant women. The people involved with the changes whom Walsh-Childers later interviewed said the changes would have occurred anyway, but that the articles helped focus attention on the issue and greatly sped the process.

Kirchheimer examined the factors which can be credited for a sudden and large increase in New York City expenditures for homeless emergency shelters from 1978 to 1985, despite the fact that "expansion of public social funding was not expected in the 1980s." The New York media's dramatic increase in the attention it gave to homelessness is among the factors cited. "The effect of media coverage was, at a minimum, to cause the attention of public officials to focus on the homeless....To a large extent, the media agenda became the agenda of public officials."

Carver found that editorial attitudes toward federal health insurance for those who could not afford to purchase their own insurance was most favorable in 1965 when Medicaid legislation was finally signed into law as compared to 1939, 1945, and 1960 when legislation was proposed but never passed.

All of the research presented in this section supports the notion that the public will sometimes respond to coverage of poverty with support for programs -- but not for changes to the political economic structure -- that provide assistance to the poor, if the coverage is framed in a sympathetic way.

Homelessness as Contemporary Issue

The Kirchheimer piece brings to light the increased attention homelessness has received from news media in past two decades, a trend which a number of researchers have noted. Blasi, for example, found that public discourse during the early 1990s on the homeless had displaced discussions of poverty and the poor. Blasi found that from

January 1, 1991 to 1994,[6] *The New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* published 2,146 articles about the homeless and 469 about poverty. He also examined the evolution of articles carried by *The New York Times* during the 1980s from a discovery of "the horror of homelessness" in 1984 to articles focusing "almost entirely on the most troubled and troubling subgroups, the mentally disordered and substance abusers, and on the 'backlash' against homeless people" in 1991 and 1992.

Penner and Penner examined the "visual ideology" of the homeless based on representations of homeless persons in editorial cartoons published in the *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Daily Californian* from September 1988 through May 1989. They noted that the cartoons were "dominated by common stereotypes," and "rarely addressed individual choices," but did, however, "demonstrate concern for the homeless." In a separate article, Penner and Penner analyzed 231 comic strips and 126 editorial cartoons on the homeless and homelessness in the *Chronicle* and *Examiner* from April 1989 through March 1992. They found that 57 percent of the comic strips and 30 percent of the editorial cartoons neutralized homelessness (used the homeless as props for other stories or issues or belittled their plight). Fifty-two percent of editorial cartoons politicized homelessness, with political figures and government bearing the brunt of criticism. They also noted that news coverage of the homeless in general increased dramatically during the early 1980s as *The New York Times* Index had only five stories under the heading "homeless persons" in 1981 and 1982, but had 82 by 1983 and 313 by 1991.

Despite the increased attention homelessness has received, like other issues of poverty, news media have also not connected it to the political economic system. McNulty examined news magazine articles and CBS news broadcasts, and found that the content contained no explicit definition of homelessness, used the term for multiple and diverse populations (mentally ill, runaway teens, families and children, threatening villains), portrayed homelessness as connected to several other social problems but without clarifying homelessness as a cause, effect or symptom of these other problems. McNulty concludes news stories portray homelessness as "a vague, incomprehensible, and intractable problem" which little can be done about.

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[6] Blasi gives no actual cutoff date for his article count, though his

Gibson included newspaper articles in his examination of the barriers stereotypes can produce in forming public policy toward the homeless. Campbell and Reeves analyzed three network news segments along with a 60 Minutes segment on a New York homeless woman who was institutionalized against her will to demonstrate how television news draws "boundaries ... between the marginal and mainstream" and "between a major socioeconomic problem demanding collective engagement and a personal problem requiring remedy." Similarly, Whang examined mini news-magazine segments on the homeless and found that homeless people were "differentiated from the rest of us" in the stories and were generally blamed for their homelessness.

The portrayal of homelessness as an unsolvable problem may help explain the findings of Kinnick, who surveyed 316 residents of Atlanta on their feelings toward three social problems, including homelessness, to test the idea that too much media coverage of these problems can lead to "compassion fatigue." Although 35 percent of the respondents reported experiencing physical reactions such as crying, sleeplessness, or

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article was published in 1994.

loss of appetite as a result of exposure to news about the issues studied, Kinnick found that desensitization was a more common reaction than "emotional over arousal."

Monolithic Poverty

The last issue of journalism and poverty which will be covered here is the journalistic tradition of creating one monolithic group of the poor out of a wide variety of disparate groups. Mayne cites newspapers as the chief vehicle in the creation of the "slum myth" during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Examining coverage of newspapers in San Francisco, Birmingham, England, and Sydney, Australia, Mayne found the discourse on slums overlooked the diversity of occupations, incomes, ethnicity and other factors while creating an "all-embracing concept of an outcast society" within working class districts in these cities.

Gans makes nearly the same argument in the media creation of the "underclass." Gans traces the development of "underclass" from a term following Myrdal's notion of economic victimhood to an eventual behavioral definition that blames the poor for their poverty. Much of this took place in social science literature in the 1960s and 1970s before being picked up by the news media. Gans sampled *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report*, finding that the term's appearance increased from less than six stories per year in the middle 1970s to 40 in the early 1980s, to over 100 between 1985 and 1990, and then declining to about 90 stories per year in the early 1990s. Gans also found that the term was used to describe African Americans almost exclusively.

Gans also found a shift on how the underclass was defined within news stories, going from being predominantly a term describing economic victimization and political powerlessness in the 1976-80 time period to being predominantly a term describing behavior – particularly unwed motherhood – in the 1991-93 time period. Gans goes on to discuss the dangers of umbrella labels such as underclass which group together large and diverse segments of the population with different "problems" under a term which is both "morally ambiguous" and somewhat definitionally ambiguous. Lumping all the poor together raises the possibility of repressive actions being taken against poor people who have not "deviated from mainstream norms" and who have done nothing illegal.

Conclusion

The evidence discussed here shows that journalists are indeed involved in "a war against the poor." According to the research reviewed and analyzed, American journalists working within mainstream media have long denied the structural causes of poverty, and in so doing have failed to make explicit to the reading, listening, and viewing pubic the relationship between the American economic system and poverty. In denying this structural aspect, journalists have had to use other explanations for poverty's existence and have most often relied on either portraying the poor as weak victims unable to fend for themselves or as behaviorally-flawed people responsible for their own poverty.

In addition, as the Gilens article discussed on pages 2 and 3 shows, along with the research by Gans, journalism portrays poverty as a problem for African Americans. Further research which supports this finding includes Lavin's analysis of a 1986 CBS News, Bill Moyers special, "The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America," in which unwed motherhood among African Americans was positioned as a major cause of poverty among blacks.

Though these conclusions are where the evidence seems to lead, it should be noted that in some ways the evidence is circumstantial, and indeed, some contradictory results have been found. For example, the Center for Media and Public Affairs analyzed 103 stories broadcast on ABC, NBC, and CBS newscasts and 26 stories printed in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* on homelessness ("Media's view"). The Center found that only four percent of sources used in the news stories blamed homelessness on the personal problems of the homeless, while the rest "blamed social or political conditions." The most often cited factor was the housing market.

Another factor to consider is that as poorly as journalists have done covering poverty, researchers have done just as poorly in focusing attention on journalists' coverage of the poor. Far too much of the literature presented here relies on the doings of *The New York Times*, or has some other New York City connection, as if the *Times* were somehow representative of the whole American journalism industry and New York City somehow representative of every city and town in America.

Beyond the New York-centrism problem, some assertions made by sociologists, historians, and others about what journalism does in regards to the poor and poverty have been substantiated by only one or two research studies. Far more research in the vein of that presented here needs to be undertaken and needs to involve media from different regions of the country in different sized markets. Though it is doubtful that many newspapers or television stations would wander too far beyond the ideological framework found here, again no evidence exists that poverty is presented the same way throughout American mainstream journalism. In addition, little of the research includes analysis of audience effects, or perception and interpretation, with the exception of the

Iyengar and Kinder research discussed on page four. Much of the research assumes a certain effect, but does not investigate the assumption.

In addition to these problems, other omissions exist in the research which has been produced. Additional research could be carried out, not only building upon the work of other researchers but also drawing connections between seemingly unrelated research topics. For example, Jolly examined *Los Angeles Times* and *Orange County Register* coverage to study "prevalent attitudes toward undocumented immigrants" in 1994, a time when resentment toward this group ran high in California and a time when California was suffering a severe economic crisis. Undocumented immigrants are predominantly poor. This raises the question of what type of overlap exists between "immigrant scapegoating," and "poor scapegoating" during times of economic turmoil. During these times of economic crisis, how much do journalists allow politicians to create scapegoats when politicians have no real answers to address economic problems?

Other possible research that could draw connections between topics would include investigations of overlap between "the war on drugs" and poverty, urban disorders and poverty, crime and poverty,[7] and whether media coverage of poverty encourages conflicts among groups within the poor, thus discouraging solidarity among the poor and decreasing their chances for gaining political power.

Also missing are studies which examine journalistic portrayals of welfare recipients and public perception of welfare recipients, journalistic portrayals of recipients compared to the realities of life for average welfare recipients, or portrayals of recipients and effects on the recipients themselves.

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[7] In two studies that have been done, Bird found that in their coverage of crime, Depression-era newspapers seldom mentioned economic conditions which led to an increase in crime during the period, and Stroman and Seltzer found voters in two Maryland counties who received most of their news from newspapers "targeted poverty as the major cause of crime,"

Also missing is research that examines the growing homeless media, or street newspapers, some of which also have a presence on the World Wide Web. Comparison studies with mainstream media may produce interesting findings on how the homeless and poor see themselves. Studies of contemporary ethnic media and of inner-city neighborhood newspapers would provide follow-ups to Hindman's research on an inner-city paper in Phillips, Minnesota, in which she found the journalists torn between the demand for mainstream "objectivity" and advocacy journalism. Within mainstream media, a question so far unanswered is the degree to which journalism constructs homelessness as a local or even national phenomenon, as opposed to an international problem – an estimated 3 million people were homeless in Western Europe at the start of the 1990s (Stearn).

Research on specific relevant time periods is also missing. Almost no research is available on the Depression era beyond Olson's 1935 essay in which he asserted that the public was beginning to question whether journalists were "any longer a champion of their rights" and in which he stated there was "a growing dissatisfaction with an agency that tries to lull them with comic strips, serial stories, movie gossip and advice to the love-lorn while they are desperately groping for the answers to bewildering new social questions." Was journalism able to stay within its traditional ideological framework when the political economy suffered a major breakdown? How were the truly "new poor" portrayed? Were they portrayed at all? What about the old poor?

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while those voters who received most of their news from television cited

On the same token, almost no literature exists, aside of the McMurray piece on hunger, which examines the journalistic response to the 1960s "War on Poverty." Was journalism responsible for focusing attention on poverty which then induced a White House and Congressional response? Or did the government lead the way? This type of research would be a way to conduct more agenda-setting research in an historical context. In fact, Song has already made an initial foray in this area in an agenda-setting study of press/congressional/presidential relations during the Kennedy-Johnson and Nixon-Ford eras. Song notes that while Kennedy and Johnson were active in social welfare policy issues, Nixon and Ford were not. However, the media itself became active in promoting these issues under Nixon and Ford. Social welfare can encompass much more than poverty issues, so this area could still yield ground breaking work.

A major omission is research on journalists themselves. How much do journalists investigate politicians' claims of "Cadillac-driving welfare queens" and other inflammatory rhetoric targeting benefit programs which assist the poor? How much do journalists go along with these claims without giving them any serious thought? In 1992, for example, *The Progressive* took ABC's "Prime Time Live" and reporter Diane Sawyer to task for a segment in which the show presented a slew of unsubstantiated claims of welfare fraud and claimed welfare fraud may be "even better than robbing a bank." The segment failed to show the burdensome paperwork and bureaucratic hoops applicants must jump through before ever receiving a welfare check, as well as other anti-fraud measures which in reality make welfare fraud very difficult to accomplish. Is this

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a "lenient court system" as the major cause.

example typical of journalism's handling of politicians' targeting of government programs which help the poor?

Why would a highly respected, well-experienced journalism professional such as Sawyer present such a one-sided account? There is no body of research exploring why journalists cover poverty the way they do. Are journalists intentionally antagonistic toward the poor? Is pressure from management involved? Are there other economic constraints involved, such as the work load and time pressures placed upon journalists? Are journalists simply not educated on the subject? While these questions can be answered theoretically, drawing upon what is known about working conditions and news norms or values, the theory cannot be tested, nor can plausible solutions be found, without speaking with or surveying journalists themselves.

In addition, why does mainstream journalism continue to misrepresent poverty as a problem for African Americans and not for white Americans? In his analysis of magazine coverage of public housing, Henderson suggests an unconscious cultural and racial bias by journalists, supplemented by the need to tailor their product toward a white, middle-class and suburban audience. Are journalists aware that they misrepresent poverty this way? Again, are they simply uneducated about the realities of poverty? Or, is Henderson's explanation the appropriate one?

More work could also be done in line with a civic journalism study by Ettema and Peer that suggests journalists begin using a different vocabulary to discuss economically depressed communities; a vocabulary that promotes community-building and de-emphasizes stigma-producing labels and stereotypes.

Finally, journalism's role in the perpetuation of the view of poverty as always an undesirable condition could be explored. Beyond stigmatization that can result from particular framings of poverty coverage, does journalism promote the concept of poverty as always undesirable by promoting or supporting notions of consumption and luxury in a taken-for-granted ideology that consumption and luxury are the only desirable lifestyles and present no moral ambiguities?

All in all, poverty is too important an issue to be overlooked by the journalism research community to the extent that it has been thus far. In fact, a number of the studies presented here do not explicitly focus on poverty, but mention it only in passing. Poverty affects more than 49 million Americans, and untold numbers worldwide. At the same time, the journalism research community should be concerned about the lack of evidence produced to either substantiate or refute the claims that journalists are active in a war against poor people.

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The virtual "good neighborhood:" Tracking the role of communication in residential segregation

by

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ABSTRACT

Decades after the passage of federal fair housing laws, racial segregation persists today in the U.S., with profound socioeconomic and political consequences for the nation. Communication behaviors, from the restrictive covenants of the past to subtler interpersonal and mediated practices like steering and target marketing, are central to this injustice. This paper explains the theoretical and historical relationship between communication and residential segregation and offers a research agenda for exploring and challenging this pervasive injustice.

Introduction

The landmark Brown v. Board of Education case paved the way for racial equality in the United States in 1954. This was followed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed many forms of racial discrimination, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which addressed exclusionary practices in housing. Yet decades after the passage of federal fair housing and anti-discrimination laws, many communities in the United States still maintain a strict virtual apartheid that separates Black residents from Whites (Reed, 1991; Massey & Denton, 1993; Kirp, Dwyer & Rosenthal, 1997). In some parts of the country, racially divided neighborhoods are now even *more* prevalent than they were before the passage of civil rights legislation (Williams, Qualls & Grier, 1995).

Communication has played and continues to play a substantial role in the persistence of racial segregation. Speech, nonverbal signs, images and texts have been used as tools to direct the races to their "places." Interpersonal interaction, institutional communication, and mediated messages are all implicated. Van Dijk (1987) observes that much research in the field of communication has treated racism as a matter of individual prejudice, ignoring its social dimensions. But the widespread phenomenon of racial segregation cannot be understood merely as a collection of individual acts; the communication habits of institutions, industries and governments are also involved. Communication researchers are uniquely positioned to explain and challenge these systemic practices.

Segregation became institutionalized in the United States in the early 1900s, when African Americans who tried to settle in largely White areas met with exclusionary laws, restrictive deeds, intimidation and violence. Long after such practices were outlawed, the real estate industry continued its practice of directing homeseekers to neighborhoods where people of their own races were concentrated. Today, race continues to be a factor in the ways that real estate agents, mortgage lenders and insurers deal with prospective customers (Kirp, Dwyer & Rosenthal, 1997; Yinger, 1995; Farley & Frey, 1994; Massey & Denton, 1993). Extensive regional and national studies have documented that minority homeseekers receive less assistance than Whites in finding housing that meets their needs, and are more likely to be turned down for mortgage loans and home insurance than comparably qualified White applicants (Yinger, 1995).

Many ethnic groups, including Hispanics and Asians, have encountered housing discrimination. But no group in the history of the United States has experienced the sustained high level of residential segregation that has been imposed on African Americans (Massey & Denton, 1993), and the effects of this isolation have been profound (Yinger, 1995). Segregation has concentrated African Americans into disadvantaged neighborhoods characterized by higher crime rates, fewer public services, and lower housing values (Anderson, 1990; Wilson, 1987). It has restricted their access to job opportunities, information resources and political influence (Wilson, 1996; Darden, 1994). Schools in segregated areas are plagued by high dropout rates and severe educational disparities that threaten the life chances of African American children (Yinger, 1995; Myers, 1989). In sum, racial residential segregation is a primary cause of urban poverty and racial inequality in the U.S. (Massey & Denton, 1993).

New communication technologies have deepened the impact of segregation. African Americans use computers less frequently than Whites and have less Internet access (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998), but on-line information *about* Blacks is more accessible than ever. Census reports and the wide range of database information now available online allow marketers to easily sort potential audiences by race, sex, age, income, household size and other factors (Weiss, 1988). These techniques allow advertisers, political organizations and the media to target certain people with information while completely bypassing others -- such as African Americans in segregated areas (Gandy, 1998b). Already facing severe economic constraints, the residents of segregated neighborhoods are increasingly shut out from key political, economic and social information also.

A relatively new addition to the flood of Internet information services is the real estate Web site, which allows companies to offer consumer information about home ownership, neighborhoods, mortgage rates and listings of properties for sale -- or even to set up broker appointments or accept mortgage loan applications on line. Does this new resource reproduce the existing discriminatory communication practices of real estate markets? Does it add another layer of difficulty to the existing array of subtle barriers faced by minority home seekers? Or might the faceless and therefore potentially "raceless" anonymity of the Internet enable, for the first time, a new and unbiased flow of information to prospective homebuyers, regardless of their ethnicity?

This paper examines the relationship between communication and residential segregation. It identifies a range of communication practices related to real estate that deserve scrutiny, including historical and contemporary uses of institutional policies, interpersonal commentary, newspaper advertisements and stories, the Internet and the emerging role of on-line real estate information services. This paper serves as an entry point to the larger work of illuminating and challenging the contemporary communication processes which support residential segregation and its accompanying socioeconomic injustices.

Residential segregation as a social phenomenon

Sociological research has extensively mapped the origins and persistence of residential segregation by race in the United States. Exhaustive regional and national studies and secondary analyses by John Yinger (1995), Farley & Frey (1994), Massey & Denton (1993), Veronica Reed (1991) and George Galster (1990b), among others, have documented the history of housing discrimination over the last century and suggested a variety of causes and motivations for segregation.

According to Massey & Denton (1993), high levels of Black-White segregation are a relatively recent phenomenon. Until the 20th century, both northern and southern cities were relatively integrated. As late as 1900, the typical Black urbanite still lived in a neighborhood that was predominantly White (Farley & Frey, 1994). The intentional partitionment of African Americans began around the time of the first World War, spurred on by the migration of large numbers of southern Blacks to northern and midwestern cities. Segregation began to emerge in the 1910s and '20s through "a series of well-defined institutional practices, private behaviors, and public policies by which Whites sought to contain growing urban Black populations" (Massey & Denton, 1993, p. 10).

Early efforts toward racial separation were crude and violent. Whites boycotted and threatened businesses that gave shelter to African Americans, including boarding houses, hotels, and real estate firms. Newspaper advertisements for apartments and homes baldly specified "White only." Some neighborhoods used police intimidation to pressure recent African American residents to leave (Farley & Frey, 1994). In others, campaigns of harassment began with threatening letters and rock throwing, and escalated to gunshots, mob violence, or even firebombing if Black residents did not take the hint (Massey & Denton, 1993). Other urban Whites responded to an influx of Black residents by moving to suburbs, where exclusionary deed restrictions, neighborhood improvement associations, and hiring practices were used to keep people of color out.

These local acts were soon underscored by discriminatory federal policies. In the 1930s and '40s, the Federal Housing Administration underwrote mortgages in segregated White neighborhoods while encouraging lenders to practice "redlining" by turning down mortgage loans in minority neighborhoods. As the "American dream" of home ownership flourished after World War II, it was clear that the dream applied to White Americans only; between 1930 and 1960, fewer than 1 percent of all mortgages in the nation were issued to African Americans (Kirp, Dwyer & Rosenthal, 1995, p. 7). During this time the federal government also established the first public housing policies, concentrating lower-income apartment housing in exclusively Black neighborhoods. These practices and policies became increasingly widespread until, by the 1950s, they were thoroughly entrenched (Darden, 1995).

Residential segregation across the United States has not abated significantly in the last five decades, despite changes in other areas of social policy and practice. By the 1950s, J.T. Darden (1995) observed, most African Americans had been concentrated in urban areas. They were effectively excluded from early suburban development by private and institutional discrimination on the part of White real estate agents and landlords, discriminatory mortgage lending practices, and exclusionary zoning ordinances. In 1968, the Federal Fair Housing Act outlawed such overtly discriminatory practices, but had relatively little effect on previously established patterns of racial separation (Reed, 1991; Galster, 1990).

During the 1970s and early 1980s, ongoing increases in income, education and occupational status did not translate into residential integration for African Americans (Darden, 1995; Farley & Frey, 1994; Weiss, 1988). Some White suburbs became accessible to Blacks, but most maintained barriers to entry. As recently as 1985, the U.S. Justice Department's Community Relations Service counted more than 60 racially motivated attacks in housing cases -- including fire-bombings of African American families in Chicago and Tacoma (Weiss, 1988). Thus, many African Americans who moved from urban areas to suburbs at this time continued to live in areas with majority Black populations.

Sociologist and demographer John Yinger (1995) notes that some regions of the United States became slightly less segregated in the 1980s, but others maintained high levels of racial isolation known as "hypersegregation." In 1980, sixteen hypersegregated urban areas -- Atlanta, Baltimore, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Gary, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, and St. Louis -- contained 35 percent of the nation's Black population. A decade later, five additional metropolitan areas had joined the list of hypersegregated cities -- Birmingham, Cincinnati, Miami, New Orleans, and Washington, DC -- while the share of the nation's African American population living in such areas reached 44 percent (Yinger, 1995).

Modest decreases in segregation were observed in some areas in the 1990s, particularly in smaller metropolitan areas in the South and West, communities near large military installations, and in parts of the country with a high percentage of new residential construction (Yinger, 1995; Farley & Frey, 1994). While a few fast-growing areas of the nation can point to increased levels of racial and ethnic integration, researchers observe, major population shifts in the 1990s show "continued concentration of minority groups into specific regions and a handful of metro areas" (Frey, 1998, p. 1). Hispanic residents continued to concentrate in Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Chicago, and Las Vegas; and 43 percent of all Asians in the U.S. lived in Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco. A map of the United States laid out by racial concentration would also show "a broad swath of states in the Northeast, Rocky Mountains, and Northwest that are mostly White, and where none of the minority groups comes close to approximating their national percentages of the population" (Frey, 1998, p. 2).

Veronica Reed (1991) elucidates the three dominant models used to explain the phenomenon of segregation: theories of self-segregation, class bias, and racial prejudice. First, theories of self-segregation assert that all races prefer to live with members of their own kind. Here, the root of segregation is seen to be simple racial preference. Some African Americans may have displayed such a predilection in the early part of the century, when living in majority-White areas made them easy targets of mob violence (Massey & Denton, 1993). Some Whites have expressed "aversive racism," described as feeling threatened or made uncomfortable by contact with members of minority groups (Gandy, 1998a). However, in the current era this view has been discredited by the authors of studies of institutional patterns in racial steering (such as Yinger, 1995, Galster, 1990a, and Pearce, 1979) who have documented the widespread inequalities of treatment and the profound disparities of assistance and information encountered by White and African

American housing seekers. Yinger (1995) argues that the causes of segregation are too complex to be understood as "simply the product of White prejudice against living with minorities" (p. 134) or Blacks' desire to live in enclaves.

Class theories claim that segregation results from unequal socioeconomic distribution of racial groups and neighborhoods in terms of housing quality and costs (Reed, 1991). The cause of segregation here is seen as economic disparity. A number of scholars (including Darden, 1995; Farley & Frey, 1994; and Massey & Denton, 1993) would be unlikely to blame economic factors alone for segregation, because their analyses have found that increases in African American income levels, education and occupational status have had relatively little influence in reducing Black residential isolation. Research has repeatedly documented the unsuccessful struggles of middle-class and higher-income African Americans in some cities seeking to move out of segregated areas (Farley & Frey, 1994).

However, economic influences have been shown to be a factor in segregation. Farley & Frey (1994) observed that the least segregated metropolitan areas of the United States are those which are economically dependent on the military, while the highest degrees of segregation are found in retirement communities and those manufacturing durable goods. Another economic view is offered by George Galster (1990a), who has noted that real estate agents benefit from segregated housing markets. Wherever racially disparate communities exist alongside one another, the transitional neighborhoods that separate them form an unstable boundary. Discriminatory housing practices by agents on both sides preserve the overall pattern of segregation while maximizing turnover and stimulating agent sales commissions, Galster argues.

Finally, discriminatory theories argue that minorities are denied access to White neighborhoods because of prejudicial practices in housing markets (Reed, 1991). Here, the root of segregation is racial bias at both individual and institutional levels. Many sociologists and scholars of public policy (including Kirp, Dwyer & Rosenthal, 1995;

Farley & Frey, 1994; and Massey & Denton, 1993) find this explanation most in keeping with their research, which has documented persistent individual prejudice and systematic institutional practice. In their analysis of 70 years of case law and land use policy in New Jersey, Kirp, Dwyer & Rosenthal (1995) observe that the separation of Whites from Blacks "has resulted neither from the wish of minorities to remain ghettoized nor from the invisible hand of a smoothly humming economy. Instead, that segregation has been the product of explicit policy choices" by local governments and state legislators (p. 9).

To date, neither civil rights legislation nor individual attitude change has been strong enough to end the reproduction of segregation, though both approaches show areas of promise. The first Fair Housing Act of 1968 depended on private citizens to file complaints against suspected violators, a difficult and lengthy process. Few judgments were obtained, and the laws did not act as a significant deterrent to housing discrimination (Reed, 1991; Galster, 1990). When prejudice is deep-seated and long-standing, Stephanie Brzuzy (1998) asserts, "a law without any penalty for non-compliance will not be honored" (p. 332). The Act was amended in 1988 to allow the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Justice, and other state and local agencies to take on some of the burden of enforcement. Energetic enforcement under the Clinton Administration is beginning to have an effect (Yinger, 1995), and so are attitude changes in the real estate industry and housing markets. Though institutional discrimination persists, there is reason to believe that genuine improvements are taking place (Yinger, 1995).

Changes in citizens' racial attitudes, though worthy of note, still leave much to be desired. Over time, Gandy (1998a) notes, Whites' overall attitudes toward Blacks have become less negative. Surveys by the National Opinion Research Center indicate that a majority of Whites now endorse the ideal of equal opportunity for African Americans in the housing market (Farley & Frey, 1994). But polls also indicate that most Whites continue to feel uncomfortable when large numbers of Blacks enter their neighborhoods, and few Whites say they wish to move into locales with many Black residents (Farley & Frey, 1994, p. 40). In large cities like Chicago, racial resistance is blamed for the fact that most Blacks are still concentrated in the inner city and few live in suburban neighborhoods (Weiss, 1988). Plentiful evidence supports the view that racial residential segregation is so deeply ingrained in American social life that the mere elimination of existing discriminatory practices will not be enough to eradicate it (Darden, 1995).

Residential segregation as a communication problem

Residential segregation is an important topic for communication scholars in part because it casts light on the intersection of the public and private spheres in contemporary U.S. social life. William Rawlins (1998) draws on Jurgen Habermas' view of the public sphere as a metaphorical arena where political participation is enacted through discourse. He observes that understandings of the concepts of *public* and *private* structure people's social activities and "possibilities for self-creation, identity formation, intimacy, and individual integrity as well as for community and political involvement, civic responsibility, and social justice" (p. 369). In this light, the objections made by Nancy Fraser to a number of the distinctions made by Habermas between private and public arenas of life apply to the discussion of residential segregation.

Fraser (1993) argues that the labels of *public* and *private* are used in political discourse to give worth to certain views and topics and to devalue others. In particular, she observes that the term "private" has been used to restrict legitimate public debate rather than expand it in matters pertaining to private property and domestic life:

> The rhetoric of domestic privacy seeks to exclude some issues and interests from public debate by personalizing them or familializing them; it casts these as private-domestic or personal-familial matters in contradistinction to public, political matters . . . the result is to enclave certain matters in specialized discursive arenas so as to shield them from general debate. This usually works to the advantage of dominant groups and individuals and to the disadvantage of their subordinates (p. 22).

No clearer example of this can be made than the concept of home ownership in the United States. Framed as a kind of mythological state of domestic achievement, the home is an example of private property ownership, as well as an arena of intimate domestic life. John Monberg (1998) asserts that myths function effectively only when conflicts can be hidden, "but if any location is dense with the type of daily activities that force an awareness of conflict, it is the site of the home (p. 443)." As we have seen, the home (and its location and occupants) can also be seen as a site of social and economic conflict. Definitions of the home as a private domestic place and home ownership decisions as private individual acts have limited the dialogue about segregation in the public sphere and ignored the profound social impact of these choices.

In fact, discussion of the means and methods of segregation, while extensive in some areas of federal policy and legislation, has been absent from many areas of public discourse (Yinger, 1995). Evidence of the role of communication in racial segregation comes largely from legal investigations into discrimination by real estate agents, mortgage lenders and newspaper advertisements. For example, nationwide studies for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Yinger, 1995) and numerous state and regional "housing audits" have described communication behavior in housing markets across the nation, particularly those interactions characterized by the withholding of information or services. These inquiries typically involve matched pairs of testers who share comparable characteristics of sex, age, general appearance, range of income and family composition, but who are of different races. The testers visit real estate agents and ask about the availability of advertised housing units. Since the 1970s, dozens of these tests, done in urban and suburban housing markets across the United States, have offered dramatic evidence of housing discrimination.

These audits typically focus on real estate agents. In the search for housing, access to information is essential. Although housing transactions involve many individuals and organizations, from the newspaper that first runs an ad for a house to the banker who signs the closing papers, Diana Pearce (1979) notes that the real estate agent is the information overseer of the entire process:

> In consumers' eyes, real estate agents [compared to bankers or builders, for example] are frequently seen as the most expert in nearly every aspect of decision making involved in buying a house. As a group they are not only experts, they also control access to housing areas. They are, or can be, community gatekeepers, and often may see their own role as architects of the social structure of the community, and a crucial aspect of the gatekeeper role is the screening of potential residents (p. 326-7).

Of course, not all real estate agents or agencies discriminate, but housing patterns and federal audits suggest that many still do (Yinger, 1995). In 1979, Pearce claimed that discriminatory real estate practitioners were typical, both in their communities and their professions, and that they operated with the knowledge of White residents, whose "tacit, if not explicit, approval of realtors' behavior is an important factor in the continued exclusion of blacks from their neighborhoods and community" (p. 341).

When real estate practitioners do intend to discriminate, their meanings are conveyed to potential buyers or tenants through a variety of channels: explicit comments, indirect suggestions, avoidance, omissions and nonverbal performance. These exchanges are often handled covertly, Massey & Denton (1993) observe, and with a "smiling face:"

> Black clients who inquire about an advertised unit may be told that it has just been sold or rented; they may be shown only the advertised unit and told that no others are available; they may be shown only houses in Black or racially mixed neighborhoods and led systematically away from White neighborhoods; they may be quoted a higher rent or selling price than Whites; they may be told that the selling agents are too busy and to come back later; their phone number may be taken but a return call never made; they may be shown units but offered no assistance in arranging financing; or they may be treated brusquely and discourteously in hopes that they will leave (p. 98).

The end result of such behaviors is that real estate agents provide African Americans and Hispanics far less assistance in finding a house or apartment that fits their needs, or in finding a mortgage. Agents show minority customers far fewer houses and apartments than Whites, or sometimes none at all in the neighborhoods they desire.

When such behaviors are used to direct customers toward neighborhoods where people of their own race or ethnic group are concentrated, Yinger (1995) notes, they are called "steering." Research has demonstrated that real estate agents often practice racial steering (Bahchieva, 1998; Yinger, 1995; Galster, 1990a; Pearce, 1979, among many others). When real estate agents show African American customers houses or apartments, the housing is often found to be in neighborhoods with minority concentrations and low housing values. In the most dramatic cases, African American buyers are shown houses only in Black neighborhoods, even though other houses are available. A typical manifestation of this practice occurs in the "steering by commentary" observed by Yinger (1995) and Galster (1990a and 1990b) in housing and rental audits. In this practice, real estate agents do offer information about available housing in a requested location, but communicate to both Black and White consumers in ways that discourage the purchase or rental of housing there.

In a number of regional studies, agents tended to make more comments, both positive and negative, to Whites than to minority customers (Yinger, 1995). Whites typically heard positive comments from real estate agents praising neighborhoods and schools in predominantly White areas. They heard discouraging comments from real estate agents in areas with a population more than 30 percent Black (Galster, 1990a). One in four White customers heard negative comments when the advertised unit they asked to see was in a neighborhood that was 50 percent Black, and half of White customers heard such comments from realtors when looking at properties in an all-Black neighborhood (Yinger, 1995). Black customers heard relatively little commentary of any kind from agents about neighborhoods or schools in predominantly Black areas. However, a number of Blacks were discouraged from buying in predominantly White areas "because of prospective 'trouble' they would face there" (Galster, 1990b, p. 4)

Audits have shown that the steering of individual customers is accompanied by equally powerful steering in real estate marketing (Bahchieva, 1998; Yinger, 1995). Homes for sale in largely minority or integrated areas are marketed less actively and advertised less widely than housing elsewhere. Real estate companies that market properties in these areas are less likely to hold open houses, to list such properties in newspaper advertisements, or to belong to multiple listing services that would allow customers to search for housing in other neighborhoods (Yinger, 1995). Because most people search for housing by reading newspaper advertisements and contacting real estate brokers, these practices limit the access of consumers of all races who wish to live in integrated neighborhoods.

More evidence can be found in the discrimination complaints and lawsuits tracked by professional real estate organizations and nonprofit fair housing organizations. The online Inman News service publishes daily reports of developments in the real estate industry, including significant discrimination cases. The nonprofit National Fair Housing Advocate publishes a newsletter and maintains a database of 1,160 complaints filed by fair housing organizations around the country on behalf of citizens between 1990 and 1997. Such reports list the details of cases, settlement amounts and judgments obtained in suits involving buyers, tenants, developers, real estate agents, mortgage lenders, and housing authorities. The majority of these suits, 53 percent, involve allegations of racial discrimination (National Fair Housing Advocate Online, 1999).

Accounts of citizen complaints describe a wide range of communication behaviors and modes. In one case, a Chicago landlord refused to rent a house to an African American man and his White wife, saying explicitly that she feared that outraged neighbors might attack the couple and damage the property (National Fair Housing Advocate Online, 1998). A complaint against a Wisconsin insurance company included, as evidence, orders scrawled by a district manager across the bottom of a computer printout, "Quit writing to all those Blacks!" (National Fair Housing Advocate Online, 1995). A third suit involved complaints made against a New York apartment leasing firm for running newspaper ads featuring photographs of all White models (Ragin v. Harry Macklowe Real Estate Co., 1993, U.S. Court of Appeals, 2nd Cir.). In another case, an African American tenant charged that the Boston Housing Authority had failed to act when neighbors began spray-painting racial epithets on the walls of his building and leaving Ku Klux Klan fliers on his doorstep (National Fair Housing Advocate Online, 1996).

Although the mainstream press pays only scattered attention to ongoing patterns of housing discrimination, in some instances newspaper texts also provide a source of evidence for the role of communication in segregation. In 1988, coverage of discrimination in mortgage lending won *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* a Pulitzer Prize for its series, "The Color of Money." Journalist Bill Dedman, the author, continues to maintain a website describing cases involving mortgage and insurance redlining which have been investigated by the U.S. Department of Justice since 1992.

However, evidence of discrimination can be found elsewhere in some newspapers -- in the home ads, a key ingredient of real estate practice (Williams, Qualls & Grier, 1995). Because these ads form one of the primary sources of information used by home seekers (along with family, friends, business associates, real estate agencies, signs, banks, builders and contractors), discriminatory ads may have the potential to dissuade people from seeking housing in certain neighborhoods or buildings. Prior to the passage of fair housing legislation, newspaper ads were free to indicate racial preference, and "No Blacks allowed" references were common. After 1968, when the Federal Fair Housing Act forbade references to race, color, religion, sex, handicap, familial status, or national origin in real estate advertising (Real Estate Center, 1996), the texts of newspaper ads could no longer make specific references to race. But often, the faces of the models shown in photographs of homes and apartment complexes continued to be White.

The courts have had difficulty in identifying prohibited racial references when they occur in ads, and have not always been able to determine whether such ads have had discriminatory intent or discouraging effects. Years ago, Williams, Qualls & Grier (1995) observe, phrases such as "white only" explicitly stated the message of racial discrimination in print real estate advertisements. "At issue now is whether housing advertisements can convey the same message through more subtle means, such as visual cues" (p. 6).

Recent court decisions have found that using only White models in real estate advertisements does send a discriminatory message to other races. In a study by Williams, Qualls & Grier, (1995), African American and White respondents were asked to view groups of real estate ads with White models only and with a mix of Black and White models. Typical responses to the all-White ads included: "Because the 'actors' are perceived to be all Europeans, I would question if African Americans would be welcome here;" and "From people pictured on posters, this apartment complex is 'for white only'" (Williams, Qualls & Grier, 1995, appendix).

Some newspapers have acted to address the possibility of discriminatory ads, on their own or with assistance from the courts. In 1993, in partial settlement of a lawsuit, *The New York Times* adopted a policy requiring that pictures of people in housing advertisements be representative of the racial makeup in the New York metropolitan area (Glaberson, 1993). In 1994, the publishers of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Daily News* adopted a handbook telling advertisers not to use "code" words to put messages of racial preference in their ads. The handbook cautioned against language including "such words and phrases as traditional, prestigious, established, and private community, which, when used in a certain context, could be interpreted to convey racial exclusivity" (Williams, Qualls & Grier, 1995).

While a number of overt forms of communication behavior are described here, other communication about race in housing transactions is implied, veiled, or coded. In part, this is because agents, lenders, and other professionals who intend to practice discrimination know the laws well enough to conceal any behaviors that are illegal (Yinger, 1995). But, as noted by a judge hearing a "blockbusting" lawsuit in 1975, allusions to race in real estate transactions are often easily understood without direct reference.

In blockbusting, realtors illegally encourage White homeowners to believe that minorities are moving into their neighborhood so that they will sell their homes. To set the mood, realtors have been known to take African American customers to tour houses in White neighborhoods after dark, leaving the curtains open and the lights turned on for visibility from the street. Once uncertainty has been created in a White neighborhood, the judge noted, the subject of race need never be addressed explicitly. "In this maelstrom the atmosphere is necessarily charged with Race, whether mentioned or not, and as a result there is very little cause or necessity for an agent to make direct representations as to race . . . direct mention of race in making the sale is superfluous and wholly unnecessary" (Zuch v. Hussey, E.D. Mich. 1975)

Communication about race may also be covert for other discursive reasons. Teun van Dijk (1987) observes that dialogue about race is a cognitive and social accomplishment within a communicative context. No one wants to appear to be prejudiced in public, Molefi Keti Asante (1998) maintains; even racist communicators who commonly engage in racist language in private settings "recognize that racism is socially unacceptable in major segments of the larger society" (p. 89). Van Dijk (1987) points out that speakers who want to talk about other races in a biased way often rely on complex face-saving strategies intended to present themselves positively while attaining the overall goal of negative other-description: "The expression of even the most racist opinions tends to be embedded in moves that are intended to prevent the inference that the speaker is a racist" (p. 22).

The semantic moves used in housing transactions may include indirect language in which race is implied or understood through other symbolic representations. One such symbol is school performance. The reputation of a school system tends to be related to its racial composition and the poverty concentration of its nearby neighborhoods, notes policy expert Gary Orfield (1996). Discourse about school quality (or about other neighborhood factors, such as crime rates, household size, etc.) may be understood by a realtor and a potential customer to be information about race, though never defined as such. If the implied message is not understood, nothing is lost; if the customer understands, the point is made. Covert communication messages of this type, necessarily, are more difficult to trace.

On-line communication and information discrimination

A similar set of symbolic representations may now be found on the Internet information pages of real estate companies. Before we consider these as texts, however, we must first appreciate the unique context the Internet has created for these messages. Because online technology is precipitating important changes in a number of social relationships, including those of buyers and sellers, it is necessary to take a look at these interactions before attempting to "read" Internet real estate sites or consider their possible roles in the reproduction of residential segregation.

In the early years of its introduction to consumers, the Internet was praised for creating "virtual communities," social networks that engaged heterogeneous, far-flung groups of people in the electronic sharing of common interests (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Rheingold, 1993; Turkle, 1996). However, the widespread adoption of the Internet as a channel for commerce has stimulated new patterns of exclusion, breeding not connection but distinction. Individuals may want to participate in today's technology-driven realm of public discourse, Rawlins (1998) posits, but they want to do so selectively:

> People want access to information about themselves, others, innovations, and events that affect them . . . Sometimes they want access to differences - in points of view, vocabularies of motives, historical and cultural traditions. Other times they want access to people similar to themselves and to the means to reinforce the boundaries that set them apart from others (p. 379).

This desire for the power to differentiate is clearly demonstrated in the emerging field of e-commerce. John Monberg (1998) identifies retail environments as sites of cultural production; as many retail businesses move on-line, the vast amounts of consumer data they collect create a new kind of hierarchy based on "status through symbolic possession," or the ability to shop. In this competition for status, Monberg (1998) maintains, "the maintenance of self-identity for the successful consumer requires a population of nonconsumers, of relatively disadvantaged lifestyles against which relative success is measured. This cultural-economic system requires inequality" (p. 428).

The worlds of commerce and politics have been quick to exploit the resources of consumer data as a tool for differentiation. Segmentation is the practice of combining and linking huge data sets to identify potential clusters of consumers for retail, political and media appeals (Novek, Sinha & Gandy, 1990; Weiss, 1988). "Geodemographic clustering" identifies groups of consumers by combinations of identifying factors gleaned from computer databases -- geographic location, sex, race, age, household size, occupation, income, medical history, purchasing habits, media use, charitable donations, political orientation, and so on. While segmentation predicts consumer behavior, its companion practice, targeting, aims advertising and other messages only at the clusters or populations gauged most likely to respond.

The segmentation and targeting of consumers along racial and ethnic lines has become widespread since the early 1980s, Oscar Gandy (1998a) observes, aided by the well-entrenched structures of residential segregation.

> While sensitivity to the charge of discrimination may have tended to temper the discourse of race within the marketing community, few doubt that race and ethnicity have been utilized in the development of commercial appeals. The social facts produced and reproduced by aversive racism -- the racially homogenous neighborhoods that are so characteristic of the United States -- helped to elevate the usefulness of a technique called geodemographics (p. 121).

The net effect of these practices, in the hands of political candidates, pollsters, media organizations, retailers, and other users, is to exclude vast segments of the population from public life, based on the characteristics of location, race, and income. Because segmentation and targeting focus on people with more resources who are more likely to purchase expensive consumer goods and services, those with fewer resources and lower purchasing power are being shut out. Gandy (1998b) warns: "The people who are most in need of information are least likely to receive it" (p. 18).

In this mood of increasing consumer differentiation, access to the Internet and other emergent technologies is being seen as an imperative -- not just an innovation or a convenience, Monberg (1998) claims, but a portal to social and political participation:

> If reality is lived social relations, then conflict over access to the power to signify, access to the technologies that write the world, access to the instruments for enforcing meanings, must be understood as a crucial battleground. Information technologies map the social when they inscribe

> fine-grained, overlapping differences of age, gender, income, occupation and race onto social experiences -- determining what experiences are shared, who is connected to whom, who is excluded, and on what basis (p. 451).

Like other goods and services, access to the Internet is increasingly determined by technological familiarity, ability to pay, and the priorities of advertisers -- all characteristics related to the age, race, income, education, and geographic location of the consumer. Limits to Internet access are quickly translating into racial differences in on-line search- and purchase-related skills and behaviors (as noted by Novak & Hoffman, 1998). At present, White households are more than twice as likely to own a computer than Black or Hispanic households (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 1998). White consumers are significantly more likely to have searched for product information and made purchases on-line (Novak & Hoffman, 1998, p. 13). African Americans in rural and inner city areas have the lowest rates of Internet access. Though some see the gap between rates of Internet use by Whites and African Americans decreasing (Rubin, 1999; Novak & Hoffman, 1998), especially among young users, the disparities of the "digital divide" are already having effect. Patterns of segregation laid down decades ago are influencing African Americans' access to vital information resources in the current day.

The role of Internet real estate sites in residential segregation

Of course, online retailers don't discuss "the digital divide" or segmentation practices with the potential consumers they hope to lure into the new symbolic realm of ultimate shopping. Instead, the menus and navigation aids used to make sense of Internet web sites construct attractive conceptions of place and meaning for their users, Monberg (1998) asserts: "Interactive settings can be designed to create the qualities of place described as the consumer's paradise, where products of consumption are highlighted and all other community attachments and social roles are removed from the landscape" (p. 450).

In the last few years, on-line real estate information services have joined other forms of retail marketing on the Internet. Name-brand real estate corporations such as

Century 21, ERA, Re/MAX, and Coldwell Banker maintain their own sites, and so do numerous other marketers of residential properties. Perhaps the busiest of these sites belongs to the National Association of Realtors (NAR), a professional organization that claims more than 700,000 members. NAR maintains that it lists more than one million properties on its Web site, and claims that the site attracts 62 million "hits" each month (National Association of Realtors, 1999).

Although surface features may vary from company to company, the residential Web sites address their visitors as members of an active, independent audience seeking information about affordable homes that meet their needs. (Similar sites exist for similar consumer services associated with rentals and relocation.) In a confidence-building rhetoric of consumer empowerment, these sites offer prospective homebuyers a flood of reassuring advice about home ownership -- from how to find the perfect house to current mortgage rates to moving tips. The goal of such sites, of course, is to get consumers interested in the company's residential property listings and to close a deal. Given the discriminatory practices involved in face-to-face interactions in the real estate industry, might these Web sites make it possible for a lessening of segregation in cyberspace?

As a marketing strategy, many of these Web sites offer "free information" to help home seekers find the homes of their dreams -- and to build trust in the real estate company sponsoring the site. One of the most common offerings is the "neighborhood profile." The consumer enters the street address or ZIP code of a potential home and receives a detailed description of the neighborhood's schools, crime rates, cultural amenities, property values, residents' income levels, and other attributes. These data help create a symbolic environment of stability and value. A block or neighborhood in one city or suburb may be contrasted to others in the county or the state. The level of analysis offered by these profiles can be quite fine: some list the languages spoken in the homes of a city by total percentage of residents, the education levels and occupations of one's potential neighbors -- even the times of day they leave for work.

The race and ethnicity of one's potential neighbors are not mentioned, but that information is certainly publicly available. Demographic information companies such as Lysias, Inc., Taconic Data, Claritas, and First American Flood Data Services obtain much of their statistical data on age, race, ethnicity, sex, household size, income and occupation from the U.S. Census Bureau before packaging it for easy use by the real estate industry and other commercial clients. Private citizens can access the Census Bureau's reports in paper form, on the Internet, or on CD-ROM.

This flood of so much demographic information on line has some practitioners worried. The Fair Housing Act forbids the use of any information to steer potential residents toward or away from neighborhoods because of their racial makeup, and "neighborhood profiles" containing racial demographics almost seem custom-made for such a purpose. In the absence of a specific directive on on-line advertising from HUD, some companies, like Lysias, have removed the racial and ethnic information from their neighborhood analyses (Lysias, 1998). In February 1999, the National Association of Realtors took a stand against the use of racial and ethnic demographic information on its members' real estate Web sites (Inman News, 1999). Of course, any individual who wants to know the racial makeup of a particular neighborhood can go on line and get it from the U.S. Census Bureau himself; but increasingly, large real estate companies are refusing to provide that information.

In one way, then, it appears that the industry is working to keep its heralded new resource from discriminatory uses. But there are other reasons why these Web sites may not be especially helpful in changing the conditions of housing search for African Americans. For some users, part of the appeal of the Internet is its illusion of anonymity, the idea that an individual can be in a public place or performing public acts but still free from identification. Laurie Lee (1996) notes that "faceless" on-line communicators are "less likely to be influenced by cues to status and power and by group pressures of conformity" (p. 129). If they were allowed to remain anonymous, minority home seekers who have faced discrimination from live real estate agents might prove more successful on line, where the color of their skin is not an issue.

However, Internet advertising sites use interactive strategies that establish an exchange of information between the advertiser and the customer, so anonymity is impossible. To order the customized "neighborhood profile," a visitor must provide significant personal information in return, such as name, e-mail address, occupation, income, household size, reasons for desiring to move, and the amount of cash available for a down payment. Some neighborhood and school profiles are available on a fee basis; others are free, once the customer has provided personal information in return. While customers are not asked their race, as we have seen, that information can be surmised from a street address and a Census Bureau CD-ROM. If companies or individual agents still choose to discriminate, they may use the Internet for that purpose, too.

Finally, if Black or Hispanic consumers own fewer computers, have less access to computers at work, use the Internet less frequently and search for product information on-line less frequently than Whites (Novak & Hoffman, 1998), then most of the visitors to real estate Web sites will be White. Real estate Web sites are not much use to people who do not have access to them. In addition, these sites do not address the threat of information inequality already produced by segmentation and target marketing in segregated neighborhoods. Although communication technologies may be used in the future to give people of all races equal access to housing opportunities, they currently reproduce many of the same constraints currently faced by African Americans.

Conclusions

Communication has played and continues to play a substantial role in the persistence of racial segregation. Interpersonal interactions have involved direct and indirect speech, nonverbal signs and aggressive actions. Mediated messages have included images and texts. Institutional policies and organizational practices have also been implicated. Over the last hundred years, communication codes and behaviors have helped to structure and maintain a system of apartheid in the United States that perpetuates vicious social and economic inequalities, particularly on African Americans. The entrenched patterns of segregation in inner cities and suburban areas across the nation are difficult to dislodge, and have taken a serious toll on the life chances of many people of color.

The Internet real estate site, which allows companies to offer consumer information about home ownership at the click of a mouse, offers the promise of change. It allows the consumer more autonomous access to property listings and interest rates; thus, minority buyers may be better informed about housing opportunities, home financing and their rights when they engage with real estate agents. However, the disclosures of personal information required by some of the sites mean that consumers still risk encountering discrimination from real estate agents or mortgage lenders on line. Low rates of Internet use among Blacks and Hispanics also indicate that Internet real estate resources may need to be viewed as potentially exclusionary communication sites.

The relationship between communication and segregation is complex and demands further study. Despite the covert nature of much contemporary communication about race in housing, potential areas for further exploration include a wide variety of historical and contemporary oral and textual resources. Historical communication is found in documents such as the exclusionary laws, zoning ordinances and restrictive deeds that first institutionalized segregation. The fair housing audits conducted for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1977 and 1991 are another rich resource for descriptions of communicative practices. Complaints and lawsuits filed by tenants and home-seekers offer textual accounts of discriminatory communication.

Newspaper archives contain stories about racial interaction in neighborhoods, as well as discrimination in housing and lending, though ethnic newspapers may be a better source for the latter than mainstream news. Of course, researchers should also explore archival copy from real estate feature sections that describes housing and rental opportunities, and display and classified advertising promoting single family homes, apartments, condominium complexes, subdivisions, and retirement communities. Organizational publications, such as real estate industry newsletters, codes of ethics, and surveys, should not be overlooked. As Internet real estate sites and other on-line information resources form an increasingly common part of housing transactions, they should be considered an important locus of study.

Oral communication practices are also important to help us understand the reproduction of segregation. Speeches and other political rhetoric (such as those by Presidents, HUD secretaries, the Attorney General) have been part of a cultural climate that has at times supported or challenged widespread attitudes of racial avoidance and discrimination. Individual homebuyers, owners, tenants and landlords have stories of personal experience to tell, as do practitioners of the real estate and lending professions. Members of tenant advocacy groups and professional organizations can offer perspective on the conflict-laden site of the home.

Critical communication scholars are uniquely positioned to explain and challenge the systemic practices that support segregation. We are able to study the communication habits of institutions, industries and governments, and to explicate the personal and private interactions of individual citizens. We are able to tease out new meanings of public and private, and question the contradictions of the marketplace that spread out before us. I hope this paper is a helpful starting point for undertaking the larger work of illuminating and challenging the contemporary communication processes which support residential segregation and its accompanying socioeconomic injustices.

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Red-baiting, Regulation and the Broadcast Industry: A Revisionist History of the "Blue Book"

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The FCC's only attempt to define the "public interest" responsibilities of broadcasters came in the 1940s policy known as the "Blue Book." This paper refutes historian's claims that the Blue Book was informally adopted by the industry. In fact, the broadcast industry launched an incendiary campaign to defeat the policy initiative, including a Communist witch hunt targeting its authors. This legacy remains visible in the practices of the broadcast industry that purports to serve us.

Red-baiting, Regulation and the Broadcast Industry: a Revisionist History of the "Blue Book"

Abstract:

The Federal Communication Commission's only significant attempt to codify the "public interest" responsibilities of broadcasters came in the 1940s policy known as the "Blue Book," which held broadcast licensees accountable for public interest programming promises made when applying for a license. This paper refutes long-standing communication historian's claims that the Blue Book was informally adopted by the industry, and continued to represent the FCC's position long after its release. In fact, after laying in wait for the release of the Blue Book, the broadcast industry launched an incendiary campaign to defeat the policy initiative, including a Communist witch hunt targeting its authors. Following the industry's precedent-setting campaign, broadcasters successfully targeted additional regulatory areas for reversal, such as the Mayflower case, and have remained largely successful in rebuffing legislative and regulatory attempts to link programming to any notion of "public service." This legacy remains visible in the current practices of the broadcast industry that purports to serve the "public interest," helping to explain why members of the industry feel they can act with impunity in the face of regulatory challenges to programming practices. This paper is a first step toward deconstructing such practices.

Red-baiting, Regulation and the Broadcast Industry: a Revisionist History of the "Blue Book"

In the mid-1990s, after a series of hearings by the FCC and Congress, the broadcast networks reluctantly agreed to institute a ratings system which described the content of its programming. All the networks, that is, save one: NBC. The National Broadcasting Company argued that its use of warnings at the start of certain programs was enough, and stubbornly refused to go further.

How is it that NBC executives could be so confident in their defiance? They need only recall a programming battle some fifty years earlier. Yet if you look to most broadcast historians for accounts of that historical period, chances are, you will be misled. NBC knew something that historians didn't.

On March 7th, 1946, the Federal Communications Commission issued a report entitled "Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees." Popularly known as the "Blue Book," the policy statement was the FCC's first (and only) attempt to define the public service responsibilities of broadcast license holders, and to hold station owners accountable for the public service promises they made when applying for licenses. This paper re-examines the time period encompassing the preparation and release of the Blue Book, along with the vitriolic response by the broadcast industry. Contrary to historical accounts, the broadcast industry was not surprised by the release of the Blue Book: the industry was aware of its preparation, and was fully prepared to defeat it. The industry attacked both the document and the FCC so successfully and with such venom—at one point accusing members of the organization with having ties to Communism—that the Commission reversed its position. Thus the programming standards set out by the Blue Book did not represent the FCC's thinking long after its release, and were not tacitly accepted by the broadcast industry, as some historians have claimed. In fact, the momentum gained from the broadcast industry's successful defeat of this attempted incursion into the area of programming has continued long after the event. It certainly explains the ongoing defiance of networks like NBC in the face of current legislative and regulatory interest in programming.

Program Service and the Federal Radio Commission

Though some see March 7th, 1946 as the inception of the Blue Book narrative, the story began quite a bit in advance. Questions about the authority of the FCC to consider the program service of a licensee date back to the inception of the Federal Radio Commission (FRC). The Radio Act of 1927 instructed the Commission to "prescribe the nature of service to be rendered by…each station," and, in considering both new and renewal applications, to determine that the "public interest, convenience, or necessity would be served by the granting thereof" (reprinted in Kahn, 1984, 42-4). Many in the broadcast industry at the time subscribed to Herbert Hoover's view of the role of the FCC simply as the "traffic cop of the airwaves," responsible for licensing the use of frequencies, and little else. However, many Commission members took seriously Congress' public service mandate. Writing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, FCC lawyer Edward M. Brecher (1946) observed that from 1927 to 1937, the Commission equated "public interest" with the "program service" offered by a licensee:

> Applications for new stations were granted or denied according to whether the promised program service seemed to the FCC appropriate to the community concerned. On renewal, a station's file was checked for complaints or other evidence of shortcomings. Most important of all, some stations were afforded special privileges... while others were penalized with reduced power, frequency changes, and shorter hours, in considerable part on the basis of the program service which they rendered. (p. 47)

Brecher noted that one Commissioner testified in 1927 before a Congressional Committee that:

> Each station occupying a desirable channel should be kept on its toes to produce and present the best programs possible and, if any station slips from that high standard, another station... should have the right to contest the first station's position and after hearing the full testimony, to replace it. (p. 47-48)

The FRC quickly demonstrated its concern for programming matters. One issue that emerged concerned the airing of phonograph records by licensees. The FRC considered them to be inferior to live music and thus "deceptive." In August of 1927, the FRC issued General Order No. 16, which required clear identification of these "mechanical reproductions." In this and other instances (*KFKB* v. *FRC*, 1931; *Trinity Methodist Church* v. *FRC*, 1932), the FRC took action concerning the programming practices of individual stations.

The power of the Commission to act in programming matters was also supported by the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), whose representatives testified during Congressional hearings on the 1934 Communications Act that "it is the manifest duty of the licensing authority" to consider past programming when renewing licenses (Hearings on H.R. 8301 [April 10, 1934], 117; reprinted in Kahn, 1984, p. 151). Interestingly, the NAB vehemently renounced this position twelve years later.

The Fly Administration

The attentions of the FCC shifted in 1938, shortly before James Lawrence Fly was appointed Chair. Questions of programming service and abuse by licensees were set aside; the Commission instead turned to the problems of network monopoly and diversity of ownership. Among other actions, Fly shepherded the network investigations which led to the 1941 Report on Chain Broadcasting (and the subsequent selling of one of NBC's two radio networks), and launched an inquiry into newspaper ownership of radio stations. With the FCC focused on network practices, individual station renewals became perfunctory; and even rudimentary attention to program service was abandoned. The FCC began to renew licenses on the basis of engineering reports alone: if no technical violations were found, then dozens of licenses would be renewed in a single action (Barnouw, 1968).

The effect of this change was apparent to station managers: the initial programming promises made by applicants would no longer be compared with station performance. Licensees began to presume that the FCC had no authority in the area of program service, a doctrine enthusiastically promoted by the NAB, which argued that the Commission was limited by Congress to deal only with problems of technical interference between stations.

Historian Erik Barnouw (1968), argued that the FCC policy of mass-renewals seemed justified at the time: many observers felt that programming had improved during the war years. However, the view that 1945 had seen a drastic decline, particularly in local programming, was also prevalent.

There are two explanations for why the investigations which led to the Blue Book were initiated. Historian Frank Kahn (1974) argued that the Commission's action stemmed from its disappointment that the programming changes hoped for as a result of the "chain regulations" had not come to pass. Affiliated stations were still relying too much on the networks for programming, and originating little of their own. On the other hand, Barnouw (1968) links the investigation to one FCC commissioner, Clifford J. Durr, who was disturbed by the mass-renewal procedure. Durr had begun to abstain from voting for license renewals when he felt there was no basis for judgment, and began to ask for detailed information on those stations slated for renewal.

One report was of particular interest: the engineering report on WBAL of Baltimore listed a fiveminute sales talk which had extended through the period when the station was required to identify itself. Probing this technical violation, Durr found that the station, once known for its live classical music programming, had been acquired by the Hearst broadcasting group, which made subsequent changes in programming. The station had exorcised all sustaining (non-commercial) programs, relying on NBC's sponsored programming instead. Durr's staff also discovered that WBAL had ignored the network's public affairs shows, replacing them with recorded music liberally sprinkled with spot announcements. In all, the investigation revealed numerous examples of "commercial excess" (Barnouw, p. 227).

Durr's staff began to examine the records of other licensees, and found that the WBAL case was not unique. An investigation of KIEV of Glendale, California, revealed that in an average week, 88 percent of its programming consisted of recorded music, interspersed with 1,034 commercial spot announcements and eight public service announcements. The most flagrant violator was San Antonio's KMAC, which in 1945 broadcast 2,215 commercial spot announcements during 133 hours of a sample week—an average of 16.65 spots an hour.

Undoubtedly, the results of Durr's investigation, preliminary as they may have been, served as the catalyst that encouraged the rest of the Commission to act. Under the direction of Commissioner Durr and his staff, the investigation into station program service continued in earnest.

On March 12, 1945, recently-appointed FCC Chair Paul A. Porter delivered his maiden address to broadcasters at a regional gathering of the NAB. He took the opportunity to alert licensees to the Commission's ongoing investigation and its growing concerns. Porter first described the current trend in licensing, noting that a potential licensee was required to make clear the type of service being proposed; Such proposals inevitably included specific promises to make air time available for civic, educational, agricultural and other public service programs. Following the station's construction and initial operation, the licensee would apply for a three-year renewal, but the record often showed that the promises made to the Commission had not been fulfilled. In part because of staff limitations, Porter noted, the Commission in the past had automatically renewed these licenses even in cases where there was a vast disparity between promises and performance. Porter then announced that the Commission was considering instituting a policy of comparing a station's initial promises with its recent performance. He noted hopefully that such scrutiny would be unnecessary if broadcasters would take steps toward self-regulation, a direction he preferred: "It is far better for broadcasters themselves to take whatever actions may be necessary to eliminate the causes of general public dissatisfaction" ("Porter Hints," 1945).

It seemed from the initial response that industry changes might indeed be forthcoming. *Broadcasting*, the unofficial (although by no means unanimous) voice of American broadcasters, responded in an often glowing editorial ("Blueprint," 1945) that Porter's speech "was the most candid and forthright appraisal of radio" they had yet heard. The magazine predicted that "Porter's pointed comments will excite swifter action," and, in apparent agreement with his criticism of the industry, concluded bluntly that "some things had to be said. The FCC Chairman said them intelligently and honestly" (p. 46). Unfortunately, not only would the journal's predictions not come true, but these would be among the last kind words spoken about an FCC Commissioner on self-regulation.

By the end of March, 1945, the investigation outlined by Porter and conducted by Durr and his staff began to focus on the records of stations seeking renewal (White, 1945). The results were so alarming that 22 of 40 stations were issued temporary renewals pending further study, rather than the customary three-year renewal. By April 2nd, the number grew to 77, with more inquiries promised. The message to broadcasters was clear: the FCC's new policy was being actively pursued ("FCC begins," 1945).

The initial reaction from *Broadcasting* was one of measured agreement. The journal reasoned that some stations were going to be cited on license renewals "where they have failed to live up to commitments as to *program or other service*. The Commission proposes to see to it that licensee responsibilities are met"

("The thorny side," 1945, p. 46). Given the future arguments *Broadcasting* would advance, this is a curious and revealing statement. The journal was admitting that the FCC has jurisdiction in the area of programming, a tacit reminder that "public interest" had in the past meant "program service." Furthermore, *Broadcasting* acknowledged that licensees were responsible for living up to the promises they made with regard to program service. Later, both positions would be repudiated and vehemently attacked.

That spring, two stories began to emerge. One, chronicled by historians, involved the developments within the FCC that led to the creation of the Blue Book. The second was the changing discourse that began to emerge from the industry itself, a dialogue that Barnouw, among others, has completely ignored. Some historians (Head, 1956; Sterling & Kittross, 1978) suggest that the Blue Book simply "appeared" in March of 1946, and a stunned and stupefied industry angrily responded. This is patently false. Industry members unquestionably knew that abuses were perpetrated by some licensees, that the Commission was obviously concerned, and that if the industry didn't correct the problem, the FCC, reluctantly, would. Yet rather than take steps to resolve the problem, the industry went on the offensive, looking for ways to prevent the Commission from taking action.

The battle of words, led by *Broadcasting* and the NAB, began in mid-April of 1945. Commissioner Durr, who frequently complained about the over-commercialization of the airwaves, was the initial target. In the first of many editorials, *Broadcasting* charged Durr with leading a reform movement within the FCC, the goal being program control ("Burr, by Durr," 1945). The editorial complained that the FCC was judging stations on information culled from their original applications which may have dated back many years, and questioned the validity of comparing ratios of sustaining to commercial programming. *Broadcasting* protested: "The yardstick in the law is 'public interest,' not commercial vs. sustaining. The public is the judge—not a body of Washington bureaucrats whose radio predilections may be at odds with the law" (p. 40). The editorial intimated that the FCC's interest in program service did not have a legal foundation, an argument which would be sharpened with time. Finally, the journal argued that industry self-regulation—not FCC intrusion—was the answer. Clearly, the FCC was in full agreement with this last statement, but only if such self-regulation would be forthcoming and effective. It was neither.

In early July a statement from President Harry S. Truman bolstered the broadcasters' cause, and may have unwittingly handicapped the FCC's efforts. On July 3rd, 1945, Truman wrote a letter to Sol Taishoff, editor/publisher of *Broadcasting*, praising the "American system" of broadcasting: "America, as the birthplace of radio, should have a free, competitive system, unfettered by artificial barriers and regulated only as to the laws of nature and the limitation of facilities." Regulation through market competition, he argued, is "preferred over rigid Government regulation of a medium that by its very nature must be maintained as free as the press" (p. 15).

More than anything else, Truman's letter seemed to the broadcasters to be an exculpation of radio, and a renunciation of FCC attempts at increased regulation. *Broadcasting* stated as much in an accompanying article written by Taishoff (1945), who argued: "These pronouncements of Administrative policy, it is logically thought, will force a revision of certain of the regulatory philosophies now in vogue at the FCC" (p. 15).

This letter provided broadcasters with the impetus and ammunition to fight the forthcoming FCC policies. *Broadcasting* argued that implicit in the President's statement was an instruction directed at "those who regulate this art to alter their concepts and discard their extreme philosophies which tend toward greater arrogations of power" ("Truman's radio credo," 1945, p. 46). To the industry, the President's action seemed to delegitimize further attempts by the FCC to formulate programming policy.

Writing Public Policy

Erik Barnouw discovered through personal interviews with staff members that the task of preparing the FCC's new policy initiative was placed in the hands of FCC staffer Edward M. Brecher, who had taken part in the promise-and-performance research for Commissioner Durr. He was instructed to complete the report within a month, which he began in late June, with the assistance of other staff members.

At Durr's suggestion, Brecher contacted Charles A. Siepmann, enlisting his aid. A British-born naturalized American citizen, Siepmann had worked for the BBC as a director of program planning before coming to the U.S. as a Harvard lecturer in 1937. With the help of Siepmann and FCC chief economist Dallas Smythe, Brecher completed the report on schedule, and delivered it to chairman Porter. A few days later, Porter left a message for Brecher: "Tell Ed—I know now how Truman felt when they told him he had an atom bomb" (quoted in Barnouw, p. 229).

Although Barnouw doesn't acknowledge it, *Broadcasting* caught wind of Siepmann's presence at the FCC, and began to inquire into his activities. Though the FCC would not provide an explanation, *Broadcasting* chief editorial writer Robert K. Richards (1945) correctly surmised that he was involved in the license renewal project, based on his previous writings and what the journal described as his BBC programming "background" (a loaded term at the time, usually reserved to describe suspected communists). The magazine also reported that he had been retained by Commissioner Durr, which it saw as a second damning piece of evidence. Not able to resist the temptation to attack, the journal insisted that Durr "lists to portside in his social philosophies, [and] believes there is too much commercialism in American radio" (p. 16). The article also revealed that Siepmann was being assisted by Eleanor Bontecue, a former employee of Justice Hugo Black. Black, it noted parenthetically (and suspiciously), was Commissioner Durr's brother-in-law. The article concluded by arguing that Siepmann's inexperience with the "American system of radio" left him unqualified for the assignment. *Broadcasting*'s campaign to smear the names of individuals associated with the Blue Book had begun, even before the policy statement had been officially released.

Following its discovery of Siepmann's involvement, *Broadcasting*'s interest in him increased steadily. Siepmann alone was singled out three times in August, and attacks on the FCC's "intrusion" into programming became a regular editorial feature. While *Broadcasting* would regularly urge stations to self-regulate rather than incite government regulation, the magazine accompanied those statements with bold claims which disavowed any need for broadcasters to change.

An article written by FCC Chairman Porter, entitled "Radio must grow up " appeared in the October 1945 issue of *American* magazine, written in the apparent hope of stimulating public discussion. Porter reiterated the need for broadcasters to remember their public responsibilities, and to narrow the gap between promise and performance. In his frustration at the industry's self-regulatory lethargy, Porter warned: "There is a saying about 'putting your house in order, before the law does it for you with a rough hand.' It is an old, trite saying, but still true, as many a proud industry… knows to its sorrow" (quoted in "Porter reaffirms," 1945, p. 74).

To this point the NAB had not entered the debate, but that changed with the appointment of former judge Justin Miller to the presidency of the organization. Miller wasted little time in making his views known. In mid-January of 1946, he appeared at a series of regional NAB meetings, and took the opportunity to present to broadcasters a "program of militant resistance to further encroachments of Government… upon radio's freedom" ("Miller calls," 1946, p. 17). In what developed into the industry's first line of defense against the Blue Book, Miller charged that the FCC was exceeding its statutory bounds in its scrutiny of programming, an action that he claimed could only lead to "greater controls and even censorship" ("Nab Head," 1946, p. 17).

On February 18, 1946, the FCC announced it had ordered a hearing on the renewal application of WBAL Baltimore, with the understanding that a comparison of WBAL's past promises and later performance would be one of the principle areas of consideration. One issue concerned the station's successful petition in 1941 to upgrade the station to a 50 kw clear channel license, ostensibly to better service farmers in the outlying areas. However, it was discovered that more than 80 percent of its commercial time had later been sold to sponsors interested only in the urban Baltimore market, and that the licensee had canceled its agriculturally-oriented programming four days after receiving the upgrade. *Broadcasting* grimly announced that the hearing constituted "virtual notice that the FCC intends to give careful scrutiny to program records in considering license renewals" ("FCC calls," 1946, p. 62). As historian Llewellyn White observed in 1947, by this time "the industry began to think the Commission was not altogether fooling" (p. 183).

The Blue Book Released

By the beginning of March, more than 300 stations had been given temporary licenses or questioned by the FCC regarding their failure to live up to past promises. *Variety* reported that the FCC was readying for release a "whopper" of a report which was expected to clarify Commission expectations of how licensees should be operating in the public interest ("FCC sharpens," 1946). Leadership of the FCC now was in the hands of newly-appointed Acting Chairman Charles R. Denny, the third person to occupy the post in 13 months. Denny was quoted in *Broadcasting* as saying that the new renewal policy would be released within two weeks ("Denny promises," 1946). Describing it as a "rationalization of renewal policy," Denny stressed that "We are not interested in program content as such, but we are concerned that licensees make good on their representations. We think these representations should be taken seriously by the Commission" (p. 15).

On March 7, 1946, the FCC released its long-awaited policy statement, entitled "Public Service Responsibility of Broadcast Licensees," which, because of its blue cover, quickly became known as the "Blue Book." (Given the industry Red-baiting that was to follow, it is ironic that the only other cover stock available from the printing department was red.) The statement singled out five stations, including WBAL, whose excesses pointed to a need for detailed review on renewal. The FCC then outlined its statutory jurisdiction with respect to program service, and admitted that its own laxity in exercising this duty to consider program service had contributed to the present dilemma.

The FCC offered a list of standards, taken to a significant degree from the industry itself, on which it would base its renewal policy. As Mr. Porter had expressed many times previously, the report emphasized that the impetus for change must come from the industry itself, rather than from government forces. Nonetheless, reiterating the FCC's statutory responsibility in this area, the Commission proposed to give particular consideration during license renewal to four program service factors: the carrying of sustaining programs, local live programs, programs devoted to the discussion of public issues, and the elimination of advertising excesses (for in-depth discussion, see White, 1947; Kahn, 1984; Meyer, 1962a).

Responses from both *Broadcasting* and the NAB were immediate, pointed, and decidedly negative. *Broadcasting* editorial writer Robert K. Richards (1946a) peevishly announced that "the Federal government is going into the radio program business" (p. 15), and described the Blue Book as "a V-2 [a German WW II ballistic missile] which, when it lands, will shatter the sensibilities of station managers from coast to coast" (p. 71). While *Broadcasting* compared the FCC's actions to the Nazis, the NAB attacked it on statutory grounds, refining the argument it had offered in January. NAB president Miller argued that the Blue Book

> reflects a philosophy of government control which raises grave questions of constitutionality. The report overlooks completely freedom of speech in radio broad-casting which was a primary consideration in the mind of Congress when it passed the Communications Act. ("Basic freedoms," 1946, p. 15)

Miller also equated the Blue Book with "that type of government control and regulation from which our forefathers struggled to escape" (p. 76). This comparison foreshadowed a second line of attack soon forthcoming, one that would liken the Blue Book to the British government-dominated system, of which Charles Siepmann was a product.

The first positive reaction to the Blue Book came a few days after the initial industry response. An editorial in *Variety* ("Let's face it!," 1946) chastised the broadcasting industry for its over-commercialism, saying that the industry "has brought upon itself the FCC proposals by its own abuses" (p. 35). The editorial offered a tightly reasoned response to the NAB's claims, arguing:

> In the regulations that the FCC now suggests, there will be no excessive government interference. The constitutionality of control that regulates freedom of expression affords a wider interpretation than that construed by the NAB. For in raising the cry against the threat to this fundamental freedom, the NAB is obscuring the issue by resorting to frantic flag-waving. (p. 35)

The *Variety* editorial noted that the NAB tactics were designed more to obfuscate the issue than to address it directly. *Variety* also observed that broadcasters could have acted to avoid the necessity of the Blue Book's release, but that the industry "had not exercised self- government, either of its own volition or by public pressure... The FCC recommendations as such could well stand as a primer for the operation of a good radio station" (p. 35).

Historians Christopher Sterling and John Kittross (1978, p. 305) describe the industry's initial reaction to the Blue Book as "calm but predictable." In fact it was anything but calm. Historian Richard Meyer's (1962b, p. 295) observation that "the industry's initial attack... was amazingly mild compared with later" is much more accurate; while the initial response was comparatively mild, it was still very much an attack. Eleven days after the release of the Blue Book, *Broadcasting* began an editorial campaign against the policy statement and all those involved with it. The initial editorial offering, which appeared on March 18, 1946 under the title "F(ederal) C(ensorship) C(ommission)," was anything but "calm." The editorial labeled the Blue Book "devious" and "contrived," "evasive" and "vicious" (p. 58). It equated the FCC's tactics of "innuendo" with those of Nazi Hermann Goering in secretly building up the German Air Force. *Broadcasting* reasoned that it is "the nature of men to multiply their power and influence," then warned:

> Have we forgotten so soon the fanatical Pied Pipers of destruction who led the German and Italian people down a dismal road by the sweet sound of their treacherous voices on a radio which they programmed? [. . .] There is more at stake than the ultimate pattern of American broadcasting. There is at stake the pattern of American life, and you can find that truth in the charred ruins of a chancellory [sic] in Berlin. (p. 58)

Over the next month, *Broadcasting* published numerous articles, editorials and news items each week relating either directly or indirectly to the report; the journal averaged seven separate items per issue in April, reaching a high of eleven on April 29th. For *Broadcasting*, the Blue Book quickly became an obsession.

An analysis of the discourse that surrounded the release of the Blue Book reveals the emergence of a number of themes, only some of which are brought forward by historians. As discussed above, the NAB, led by Justin Miller, confined its attacks to the area of statutory jurisdiction. The organization felt the Blue Book represented an arrogation of power which had not been conferred to the FCC by Congress. This theme would vary little until the end of the year, by which time the battle had been decided.

Unlike the NAB, *Broadcasting* delighted in finding new, creative ways to attack the Blue Book and its supporters. It found particular pleasure in singling out the report's contributors, especially

Commissioner Durr and Charles Siepmann. When Siepmann's book *Radio's Second Chance* (1946) was released in April, less than a month after the Blue Book, *Broadcasting* wasted no time in jumping all over it—and him. A review by editorialist Robert Richards (1946b) began by deducing that Siepmann had written not only this book, but the Blue Book as well. The author added with a trace of sarcasm: "That he could contrive such a clearly enunciated prospectus as *Radio's Second Chance* and at the same time have authored such gobbledygook as the FCC opus is high tribute to his versatility in letters" (p. 20).

Richards described the book as "a measured and cautious attack on American radio." He questioned the propriety of permitting Siepmann access to confidential FCC files, and intimated that he wrote the book while on the government payroll. The article then proceeds to interrogate the book point by point, and concludes with a criticism of

> the manner in which the book emerged from the cloistered chambers which gave its birth. Inevitably it must be asked—is Charles Siepmann its father or is he a midwife who stood in patient attendance at the bower of Clifford J. Durr? (p. 27)

Broadcasting took numerous opportunities to single out Siepmann for criticism. Writers were particularly fond of bringing up his BBC background, as a way of connecting FCC attempts at "government control" of American broadcasting to other government-controlled broadcasting systems such as the BBC. This intriguing campaign is virtually ignored by historians; yet it represents an example of the variety of brazen tactics employed by the journal, and indicates *Broadcasting*'s desperate temperament of the time: broadcasters would seemingly try anything to weaken the report, rather than have to deal with its contents.

Immediately following the "revelation" of Siepmann's involvement in the Blue Book, *Broadcasting* launched a series of articles spotlighting the deficiencies inherent in the BBC and other government-influenced systems. One article ("Freer BBC desired," 1946) charged the BBC with "timidity" in its programming—a weakness "caused by the fact that BBC is Government-controlled" (p. 82). The following week *Broadcasting* writer Edwin James (1946) announced that the BBC was considering "going commercial." James wrote that British audiences, spoiled by U.S. wartime radio broadcasts, were demanding radio service "on par with U.S. radio" (p. 46). In this particular campaign, *Broadcasting* favorably contrasted the "American system" of broadcasting with the systems of France, Australia, Canada, and India, along with the numerous analyses and critiques of the BBC.

By mid-April, members of Congress began to enter the fray. Rep. B. Carroll Reece (D-TN), newly-elected chair of the Republican National Committee, announced that freedom from program control by the FCC would be a major issue in the forthcoming November campaign ("Republican chief," 1946). Members of the Senate and House subcommittees on communications expressed their disapproval of the report, although Sen. Burton Wheeler, the powerful chair of the Interstate Commerce Committee, commented that "Generally, I approve it" (Richards, 1946c; see also "Program Report: IV," 1946). Given his endorsement, it is not surprising that Congress took no action with regard to the report following its initial release.

On May 9, 1946, President Truman re-entered the debate. *Broadcasting* proudly announced (Beatty, 1946) that the President "emphatically reaffirmed his belief in a completely free radio," which the journal then took the liberty of interpreting as a "declaration on behalf of a broadcasting system unshackled by un-American controls" (p. 15).

The Presidential announcement also inspired a rhetorical shift, marking *Broadcasting*'s first direct attack on Commissioner Clifford Durr since the release of the Blue Book, and the first attempt to brand him a Communist. Durr had certainly been the object of criticism prior to this point: *Broadcasting* had correctly identified him as the Blue Book's main proponent, and had taken pleasure in branding him for his left-of-center views. Nor was this the first veiled accusation linking Communism to the Blue Book and the FCC: *Broadcasting* had already described the Blue Book as the "FCC's program front activity" ("Closed

Circuit," 1946a). The word "front" functioned in the 1940s and '50s as a euphemism for "communist front." But this editorial ("Program report: IX," 1946) marked the first time the journal put all the pieces together in an attack on Durr, whom it characterized as "the FCC's knight errant":

> He enters the joust in righteous splendor, garbed in an academic grey suit and gripping tightly in one hand—the Blue Book. And the banner he bears high—is it the white of purity, or is there a hint of pink? (p. 58)

While the editorial leaves Durr's potential Communist sympathy in the form of a question, it provides the answer later in the piece, describing him as the "be-tasseled champion of the Pennsylvania Avenue Cardinals" (p. 58). The street mentioned was the address of the FCC building; the "Cardinals" reference is a overt play on the word "red"—a common euphemism for "Communist." Clearly, *Broadcasting*'s confidence level had risen dramatically with Truman's re-entry into the debate, just as it had previously.

Defending the Blue Book

Response from the FCC to the varied industry attacks was faint at best. The only vocal defense of the Commission's new policy from within, not surprisingly, came from Clifford Durr. Perhaps more surprising is the fact that his colleagues chose to remain silent, a sign of a lack of unity within the FCC. Chairman Denny sent two letters to legislators in response to specific Congressional inquiries regarding the Blue Book (which, interestingly, were published in *Broadcasting* ["Wigglesworth Says," 1946]). Aside from that, Denny remained strangely quiet until October, when he addressed the NAB national convention.

Despite the lack of direct statements from its Commissioners, the FCC did send the industry a few veiled signals indicating the beginning of a retreat. WBAL of Baltimore, owned by Hearst Radio, Inc.—and one of the stations which had been singled out in the Blue Book—had applied for a television channel in the same market. On May 22, 1946, the FCC announced it would grant WBAL the license ("Television Stations Granted"); Commissioner Durr had voted for a hearing, but was overruled. Then, *Broadcasting* reported ("FCC issues," 1946) that the FCC had instituted a "leniency policy," granting regular license renewal to 95 stations out of the group of 300 which had been asked to supply program information. The following week the total number of regular renewals stood at 170, including the license of WINS of New York, also owned by the Hearst broadcasting group. Only Commissioner Durr had dissented. Clearly, the Commission had begun to retreat from its earlier position.

By mid-summer, the scathing attacks on the Blue Book had all but subsided. *Broadcasting* ended its string of weekly editorials on June 17th, but continued to publish pertinent reports from the "front" on a semi-weekly basis. While the program content issue had not yet been defeated decisively, the industry held the clear advantage.

Seeking to revitalize the Blue Book, and reverse the Commissioner's retreat from the subject, two articles appeared in the popular press in August, 1946. "Storm In The Radio World," written by Charles Siepmann and published in *The American Mercury*, attempted to elicit support for the cause from the general public. Siepmann lamented that "while the trade publications have been seething with the controversy… little or nothing has been heard directly from the listening public, the long-suffering group which has the most at stake" (p. 201). But while attempting to engage the public, he admitted that the real effectiveness of the report depended on FCC action: "It [the Blue Book] can be tested only when and if the radio industry chooses to challenge some future action of the FCC that stems from the revised procedures outlined in the report" (p. 205). In this statement Siepmann is assuming that the FCC would take some action. Up to this point, the only action taken by the FCC had been to back down, as evidenced by its leniency policy, and its approval of WBAL-TV without a hearing. Furthermore, by this point the FCC had twice postponed the hearing date set for WBAL-AM, the first station whose renewal application was designated for hearing, another sign of a retreating Commission.

In August, a new public voice was added to the meager list of Blue Book proponents. Edward M. Brecher (1946), the FCC staffer who authored the original Blue Book report in July, 1945, contributed an article to *The Atlantic Monthly*. The commentary began with an eloquent description of the history leading to the issuance of the Blue Book, followed by a lucid recounting of the main points of the report. But, like Siepmann, Brecher knew that the FCC might doom the effort to failure through its lack of support:

> The real danger, it seems to me, is that the FCC may fail to administer with competence and with vigor the policies it has now announced. The Blue Book is not a self-enforcing document; its full effect will not be felt by listeners until its general principles are applied in specific cases... Whether or not the Commission will in fact implement its report is still in doubt. (p. 51)

In late September, the FCC took its last collective action in support of the Blue Book, remanding six license renewals for hearing on the basis of program service. In reporting this action, *Broadcasting* noted that "the Commission couched its announcement in language regarded as much softer than the bristling phrases of the Blue Book" (Crater, 1946, p. 15). The article also stated that of the 485 stations required to submit program analyses, 400 had been granted regular renewal. Furthermore, an accompanying article ("Hearst FM grant," 1946) reported that the FCC had conferred a conditional grant to Hearst Radio, Inc. for a new FM station in Milwaukee, with objection coming only from C.J. Durr.

The NAB held its annual national convention in late October, and featured speeches by FCC Acting Chairman Charles Denny and NAB President Justin Miller. Denny delivered a cool and congenial address; he began by announcing that his remarks had the approval of the entire Commission, save for Durr, who was attending a conference in Moscow. "But," he added, "I have no reason to believe that he would dissent" ("Denny's Address," 1946, p. 14). Given the increasingly visible rift between Durr and the other Commissioners, it is not difficult to view this statement as further evidence of Durr's isolation.

Denny outlined the salient points from the report, concluding his summation with the now-famous declaration, "That is the Blue Book. We do not intend to bleach it" (p. 42). Throughout his remarks he sought to convince broadcasters to adhere to the report by appealing to their sense of moral conscience and professional pride. At times the tone of his speech seemed conciliatory towards the industry, a detail not lost on the broadcasters in attendance. For example, Denny commented: "I have felt that we have been moving closer and closer toward a healthy but proper arm's length working relationship between Government and industry" (p. 42). To that point, the industry had not budged from its militant stance; only the Commission had shown signs of movement. It was clear that the FCC was backing down from its original position on the policy initiative.

NAB President Miller's remarks ("Miller's Address," 1946), by comparison, appeared confident and self-assured. He spent little time on the issue of the Blue Book, issuing a brief synopsis of its status and the industry's position to date. He announced:

> If it had been possible to present the issues in a case pending on appeal from a decision of the Commission, I would have preferred to do so. No such opportunity being available, I have used the other alternative. I hope the issue has been clearly made. When the opportunity comes to make it, formally, in a judicial proceeding, I shall urge that it be done. Otherwise, it is not necessary—so far as I am concerned—that there be further discussion of the Blue Book *per se*. (p. 63, 65)

Miller's announcement was a clear assessment of the state of the Blue Book: the battle of words had been won decisively by the industry. Until and unless the FCC backed the Blue Book with action, the industry could claim victory, not just in the battle, but in the war itself.

Having triumphed in this arena, Miller set his sights on new areas of regulatory conquest. In his address, he took the opportunity to re-open another contested issue which stood between the industry and the FCC: the 1941 Mayflower decision, dealing with the rights of a licensee to editorialize. Miller saw this issue as another example of unwarranted government intrusion into programming, a case, he proclaimed, "which strikes at the very heart of the First Amendment and at the provision of the Communications Act which prohibits the Commission from interfering in any way with freedom of speech" ("Miller's Address," 1946, p. 65). Having just proclaimed victory over the Blue Book, Miller saw the Mayflower case as a comparable regulatory battle, and one that could be as easily won. The NAB set aside the Blue Book, concentrating on the Mayflower case; two years later it would meet with similar success in reversing that decision.

Soon the industry, and particularly *Broadcasting* magazine, was provided with additional ammunition against the FCC. The November elections placed control of Congress into Republican hands. As a result, *Broadcasting*'s Bill Bailey (1946) gleefully predicted, "the FCC will be given one of the most thorough-going investigations ever attempted" (p. 15). The journal happily proclaimed in one banner headline that "Hell is Located on a Washington Hill—At Least That's the Way It Looks Now For FCC" (Bailey, p. 15).

These announcements marked the beginning in earnest of a new campaign against the FCC by *Broadcasting* magazine, which began to openly question the integrity of Commission personnel and ask whether some of the Commission members weren't Communist sympathizers. This aspect of the Blue Book saga is sparsely reported by historians, if mentioned at all, when in fact it represents a significant milestone in the chronology of events. The direct introduction of accusatory dialogue by *Broadcasting* is a frank indication that the fight over the Blue Book was over. The FCC was now clearly divided over enforcement of the policy, and supporters of the Blue Book were a distinct minority. No longer needing to couch its rhetoric in veiled terms, the journal lashed out malevolently at individuals within the Commission connected to the Blue Book, without fear of regulatory retaliation in the form of strict execution of the report. This can clearly be seen as a strategic move on the part of members of the broadcast industry, seeking to defend itself and its position of power by going on the offensive politically (a strategy corporate America continues to employ).

Following the Republican sweep of the November elections came numerous promises that the FCC would be thoroughly investigated in a number of areas. *Broadcasting* outlined eight specific lines of questioning the Republicans purportedly intended to pursue, including a probe of the "background of all Commission personnel, particularly those in the Law Dept. who have written certain opinions and orders" (Bailey, 1946, p. 15). The "certain opinions and orders" was a specific reference to the Blue Book. The journal's publisher, Sol Taishoff (1946) also speculated that Clifford Durr would be singled out for special attention by Congress:

> Commissioner Durr, arch liberal Wallace-school New Dealer, is certain to figure in any Republican onslaught involving the FCC... Most of his liberal friends in both House and Senate will not return. He is anathema to conservative Republicans, and Democrats too. (pp. 14, 71)

Broadcasting's accusatory pace quickened in December 1946, when the journal reported in its anonymously written "Closed Circuit" column (1946b) that a new Truman Administration committee being formed "to ferret out disloyal elements in Government (which means Communists) can be expected to forage in FCC pasture" (p. 4). *Broadcasting* claimed that members of Congress had repeatedly charged that the FCC was "shot through with persons of Communist leanings and even direct party membership" (p

4). While the threat of investigation of the Commission had been virtually an annual event since its inception, this was quite a different sort of inquiry, the first to allege that FCC personnel had Communist connections since the Dies Committee/HUAC investigations in 1943.

Broadcasting was even more specific on December 23rd ("Closed Circuit," 1946c), when it claimed that a pending HUAC report would have plenty to say about the Blue Book and its authorship. The journal maintained that HUAC investigators had "turned up choice morsels about alien influences in Government particularly FCC, with foreign-directed move to unsell public on American System of doing business, especially broadcasting" (pp. 4, 90). The "alien influence" referred to by *Broadcasting* in the FCC was most likely Charles Siepmann, with his past ties to the BBC. The following week the journal continued the accusatory tone ("Closed Circuit," 1946d), describing Siepmann and Durr as being "of Blue Book *background* (italics added)" (p. 4).

The campaign by *Broadcasting* to label Blue Book supporters as Communists continued into the new year. While no direct actions from HUAC resulted from these allegations, they nonetheless had the desired effect: the FCC continued to back away from the Blue Book.

The Commission's position shift on the Blue Book was clearly demonstrated in early December, 1946. The FCC heard the first of seven cases of licenses remanded for hearing under the Blue Book (including WBAL). In what was interpreted as a clear message to the broadcasting industry, the FCC reconsidered its original programming concerns regarding KGFJ of Los Angeles and granted the station a regular license renewal. Once again, the only dissension came from Commissioner Durr, who was overruled. With a headline proudly announcing, "Blue Book Deserted In KGFJ Renewal" (1946), *Broadcasting* called the Commission's action the "first outright abdication of [the FCC's] Blue Book stand" (p. 81). The FCC had made its last show of strength in September when it slated seven licensees for hearings out of over 400 originally tagged for programming abuses. Now even the worst offenders were being let off the hook.

The Commission's second conspicuous departure from the Blue Book came barely one month later, in January of 1947, when it granted a regular renewal license to WIBG of Philadelphia, the second such decision from the original list of seven ("Bulletins," 1947). By April a third licensee, KBIX Muskogee, Oklahoma, was added to the list; in August WTOL Toledo became the fourth station to win full renewal. The last station on the list of seven—WBAL Baltimore, the first to be singled out for flagrant programming abuses—was granted renewal over a competitor "on the basis of its [WBAL's] demonstrated competence" (FCC Reports [1950-51], 1149-89. Reported in Barnouw, 1968, p. 233). In all, not a single license was lost due to the Blue Book.

Long before the WBAL decision was handed down, Commissioner Durr began to complain bitterly that the Blue Book was being ignored by the Commission. In fact, he was recognizing a fact that had been obvious to the industry for months. Durr began a series of speeches in April 1947, charging his colleagues with "laxity in the enforcement of the principles" of the Blue Book and with lowering program standards (Crater, 1947, p. 13). The Blue Book, Durr acknowledged bitterly, had been bleached after all. Perhaps as a fitting finale to this story of industry arrogance, FCC Chairman Charles Denny resigned his post in October 1947, becoming NBC's vice president and general counsel (Barnouw, 1968, p. 243).

Conclusion

The majority of historians—Meyer (1962a), Sterling and Kittross (1978), and Head (1956), among others—have concluded that the Blue Book still represents the FCC's thinking in the area of programming, and that it has been informally adopted by the broadcasting industry. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The Blue Book existed axiomatically only in its first brief moments of life following its release. It had been mercilessly attacked by the industry at birth, and abandoned by the Commission within nine months. Its status is and has been crystal clear since the end of 1946: it no longer exists.

The Blue Book spawned a series of intriguing industry campaigns which have been all but ignored by historians. However, these actions play an important role in this important period of regulatory history. These campaigns — whose singular goal was the repudiation and denunciation of the regulators' report — included a Communist witch hunt aimed at the Blue Book's authors and supporters, one that presaged the Red-baiting frenzy that would grip the country at the end of the decade. The report also inspired the industry to reopen another controversial area of regulatory history — the Mayflower case. Here, too, broadcasters successfully defended their own interests, in a battle they may not have initiated at all had it not been for the extraordinary victory achieved against the Blue Book. It is no wonder, more than five decades later, that members of the broadcast industry feel they can act with impunity in the face of regulatory challenges to programming practices.

The Blue Book was a valiant attempt by members of the FCC to codify the concept of "public interest." But this was a concept which they had neither the backbone nor the stomach to defend. While the policy initiative may have shown some broadcasters the error of their ways, it did not, as some have claimed, affect the industry in the main. In fact, it had the opposite effect, emboldened the broadcast industry. The Blue Book initiative demonstrated that the broadcast industry could successfully defeat attempts to regulate programming, by resorting to a variety of strategies: from draping itself in a First Amendment flag in defense of the "American system of broadcasting," to financial rewards for industry supporters, and direct political attacks against its regulatory enemies.

The Blue Book stands as a bold regulatory attempt that has been historically misunderstood and misleadingly reported. While we are not likely to see a similar moment of regulatory clarity any time soon, we can learn from this historical chapter to better understand the ongoing corporate behavior of the broadcasting industry that purports to serve us.

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Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: A Critique of Criteria for Letters-to-the-Editor

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Understanding the Conditions for Public Discourse: A Critique of Criteria for Letters-to-the-Editor

One of the few arenas for public discussion to have survived unchallenged and mostly unchanged throughout a large period of the history of American mass media is that of the letters to the editor section in the daily newspaper. Readership surveys consistently indicate that the letters section is one of the most popular items of the newspaper in general. About half of the newspaper audience reads the letters page every day, whether it be to recognize the names and writing of friends and family, or to tune into the opinion of voices of authority, speaking up in national newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post.*[1]

The letters section has historically been seen as "among the few outlets available to the public for voicing opinion," "the community's heartbeat," and "a debating society that never adjourns" (Kapoor and Botan, 1992).[2] Journalism scholarship celebrates the letters section as a public forum "essential to the effective operation of the democratic system" (Hynds, 1991, p. 124). Articles in trade magazines and academic journals on letters to the editor abound, yet they rarely ask the question of whether a "public forum" such as the letters-to-the-editor section provides us with an opportunity for the kind of debate we need in a democracy.[3] This paper tries to interrogate just that problem by identifying the criteria of quality, style, and topic that editors use in their selection of letters. In other words, it identifies and investigates the rules that guide this "public forum" and thus construct the public debate. Though there is great variation between and among newspapers in terms of how many letters they receive, and how many they can publish, this paper argues that editors at most U. S. newspapers, regardless of their size and type, share certain fundamental standards of selection. Some editors, particularly at small-circulation, weekly papers have sufficient space and a low enough quantity of letters to publish the vast majority of submissions, whereas large and widely read urban papers, such as the *New York Times* must pick less than 10% of their submissions (cf. Kapoor and Botan). But regardless of how large a percentage of letters they publish, editors agree on what constitutes good and bad letters, and by following those conventions, they standardize the public debate of letters to the editor.

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[1] See Finnegan (1968); Milburn (1968); Moler (1976); Ryon (1992a; 1992b) to trace the constancy of popularity over a period of 30 years of letters to the editor -- all of these editors argue, based on readership surveys, that the letters section is one of the most important parts of the newspaper as a result of its immense popularity.

[2] See also Carey (1992, p. 168). For information about the first letter to the editor, consult Renfro (1979); Rosenthal (1969).

[3] See Hynds (1994). See Bogart (1989) for a study of the popularity of letters to the editor. For studies of letter writer profiles, see Buell (1975); Sparks & Perez (1991); Sigelman & Walkosz (1992); Tarrant

The paper locates four different "rules" or criteria for letters to the editor; the rules of relevance, entertainment, brevity, and authority. By identifying "rules" for selection of letters, this paper does not propose that letters are chosen according to rigid, unalterable institutional instructions. Instead, this paper is concerned with those unwritten, implicit and explicit rules that arrive, and are maintained, in the form of newsroom practices. They are also rules in the sense that they *rule* the public discourse: They determine what kind of debate takes shape on the letters pages. Such rules get to the core of how editors view the role of their feature within the newspaper, and in the larger context of U.S. democracy. By constructing the public of letters to the editor, they subtly determine whose voices and concerns are systematically privileged, and whose never stand a chance of being heard. At a broader level, the paper asks whether the kind of discussion that takes place on these pages squares with an ideal of democratic discussion. Habermas's theory of discourse ethics is drawn on to trace what such an ideal might look like, and to suggest some ways in which we could improve debate in the letters section.

The approach employed here seeks to investigate the ways in which the *structure* of the letters section configures access to, and diversity and deliberation in this forum. It seeks to escape from a squarely liberal understanding of the First Amendment -- one that cherishes free expression, but is "indifferent to creating opportunities for expression" (Barron, 1967, p. 1641). Instead, this study is driven by a desire to understand how expression operates under the practical constraints of today's newspapers.[4]

The paper gets at these questions by looking at letters editors' discussion of their practices in the National Conference of Editorial Writers' quarterly publication *The Masthead. The Masthead* has published a range of special symposia and articles on letters over the past 30 years, and offers a rich explication of how editors of daily newspapers would like their letters section to appear, why, and what they see as the justification of their practices. Articles in *The Masthead* about letters to the editor are read in an attempt to understand the reasons and consequences for the practices and ideologies that shape the letters section: The textual analysis operates under the assumption that "all artifacts are inscribed with ideology, and in ideological criticism, rhetorical artifacts are treated as symptoms or textual evidence of ideology" (Foss, 1996, p. 297).[5]

(1957); Vacin (1965); and Volgy (1977).

[4] This section borrows heavily from Garnham's discussion of the merits of Habermas' public sphere model (1994, esp. pp. 360-362). The idea of the marketplace model as a "romantic" one is borrowed from Barron (1967).

[5] See also Durham (1999, pp. 105-107).

To locate the mechanisms underlying the letters section, we need to examine *foundational* aspects of journalism, rather than merely critiquing the surface manifestations; the everyday practices which are the *symptoms* of the foundations. This means that the questions of bias, reader profile, and page design, with which many studies of the letters column concern themselves have little relevance for our purposes.[6] The present avenue of inquiry turns our attention away from research into "how well or badly the various media reflect the existing balance of political forces and the existing political agenda" (Garnham, 1994, p. 361). In bypassing questions of editorial bias and moving toward an interrogation of the *structure* of the letters section, the analysis directs our scholarly gaze to the ways in which "ideology is a function of the discourse and of the logic of social processes, rather than an intention of the agent" (Hall, 1982, p. 88). The analysis points to some of the more profoundly systematic, socially grounded origins of editorial practices. It transcends the examination of individual motivation, making the assumption that the actions of individuals are indicative of the social context in which they operate, in this case, the culture of the newsroom.

In other words, the statements of the newspaper editors are not merely read for their surface meaning. They are read to uncover the underlying web of social and ideological implications; they are read to find out what is taken for granted, and viewing *that* as the central problematic. As Ang explains in introducing her "symptomatic" reading of letters from viewers' of the television soap opera *Dallas*, "we must search for what is behind the explicitly written, for the presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them" (1993, p. 11). Articles in *The Masthead*, then, are analyzed as discourses produced by editors to justify the way they select letters.[7]

Briefly stated, the paper argues that the journalistic mythology of the letters feature pays heavy dues to the idea of public deliberation. Nevertheless, the practices of the page are couched within the ideology of profit-making media operation, rather than that of sustained and ongoing public deliberation. As a result of the lack of a *normative* orientation, the criteria of letter selection focus on creating the conditions for success in the market, rather than democratic deliberation. We draw on Habermas' theory of discourse ethics to understand the implications of such practices.

Discourse Ethics and the Ideal Speech Situation

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[6] See Bohle (1991, 1992), and Williams (1992) for critiques of letters page design. See Renfro (1979); Pritchard and Berkowitz (1979); Yoakum (1971), for discussion of bias.

[7] Cf. also Ang (1993; p. 11).

Habermas' immense body of work appreciates and anticipates the challenges of communicating in a diverse democracy. In the course of a rich academic career, in his work on discourse ethics and the public sphere, Habermas has been concerned "to identify the ways in which a self-critical public sphere might be realized in modern societies [and in] normative and institutional questions surrounding this project" (Baynes, 1994, p. 316).

Habermas offers us a compelling vision of the role of media in democratic practice. They guide us toward the question of how the media should go about providing the conditions for deliberation. Habermas argues that public opinion should based on conversation among citizens: Rather than being the sum aggregate of individual opinions, it is something we arrive at *in common*.[8] Individuals can never justify normative claims on their own. Instead, justification is based on an intersubjective process of argumentation that has consensus as its goal.[9]

The Ideal Speech Situation

In his theory of discourse ethics (Habermas, 1993; 1995a; 1995b), Habermas identifies a set of universal procedures for the justification of moral claims which he sees as necessary to bring about the "ideal speech situation," the condition on which a healthy public sphere is based.[10] Habermas proposes that only "those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their *capacity as participants in a practical discourse* " (1995a, p. 66, italics in original). He thus envisions a cooperative conversation between citizens, who get together on an equal footing in public to reach agreements on erupting or ongoing conflicts.

Ingrained in the notion of the ideal speech situation is a set of presuppositions about the terms of the conversation. Habermas argues that these presuppositions underlie all communicative action, as they are "presuppositions that are adopted implicitly and known intuitively," and they are necessary for us to engage in the interaction and accept the truth claims of others (Habermas, 1990, p. 91). From this series of presuppositions, Habermas derives a number of rules regarding the regulation of communication. The rules are intertwined, overlapping, and not easily separable from each other in practice, though the separation between them is *analytically* useful.

The first presupposition of the ideal speech situation is that of universal access for everyone concerned with the issue being discussed, from which the following rule is derived: "Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse" (Habermas, 1990, p. 89). Along these lines, rational argumentation toward consensus implies that each individual has *equal* rights to participate in the discussion.

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[8] Cf. Taylor (1990, p. 109).

[9] See Habermas (1993, 1995a).

[10] See Benhabib's (1995) discussion.

A second presupposition is what Habermas calls complete reversibility of arguments or, borrowing from George Herbert Mead, 'ideal role taking'. According to this presupposition, a substantive process of argumentation requires participants to 'bracket' their social status and values, and be empathetic to other participants' arguments. To be able to set aside their own stakes, they must not merely understand or tolerate others; they must be able to see themselves in the situation of these others.

A third presupposition is that participants enter into the conversation motivated not by self-interest, but with an honest willingness to submit their arguments to the scrutiny of all other affected participants. In Habermasian jargon, this means acting communicatively, or in the pursuit of a generalizable interest, rather than strategically, that is, toward the fulfillment of special interests.

The fourth and final presupposition is that the validity of arguments is weighed on grounds of rational argumentation, rather than through coercion. Participants must *freely* accept the norms put under public scrutiny, reasoning on the validity of its truth claims regardless of the social status or rhetorical abilities of the speaker. Nobody should be able to impose their opinions on others -- a Bill Gates should have no more say than the impoverished welfare mother; and likewise, the welfare mother should not feel compelled to accept the arguments of Bill Gates because of his privileged financial and socio-economic position.

Habermas argues that the discussion should never be divorced from "the concrete point of departure of a disturbed normative agreement" (1995a 103). These disruptions of the normative consensus set the agenda for the discussion.[11] Practical discourses hence depend on concrete, substantive content external to the abstract understanding of norms -- they depend on material fed into it from the outside. As Schudson (1997) points out, democratic "talk centers on public matters. This also means, I believe, that what democratic conversations are about comes from public sources. The newspaper is the historically central source of democratic conversation" (1997 305). Beyond offering information; the stuff of which democratic conversation is made, newspapers must also solicit the introduction of new substantive content from citizens. Hence, letters to the editor selected for publication should not only address normative concerns as reflected in ongoing stories placed on the agenda by the news organization itself. They should also allow for members of the public to introduce topics, and open them up to the critical scrutiny of public debate.

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[11] Cf. Habermas (1995a, p. 103).

The role of the media in Habermas' understanding is not one of providing the public, as a constellation of individual consumers, with the gratification of particular wants. Instead, the media ought to provide the conditions for the on-going critical deliberation on norms that the public needs to discover truths in common. As Schudson (1997) has argued, it is not sufficient for a democratic deliberation to be rule-governed; every participants should be allowed a say in the establishment of these rules. This means that the issues taken up by the debating citizens that constitute the public sphere should not be limited to "current events" and news items on a media agenda; on the contrary, the subjects of debate should include the core premises and structures of society.[12] Only by *selecting* particular norms -- by debating this input and discursively discarding norms that defy consensus, justification can be accomplished.[13]

Editors' Vision of Letters: The Public Forum

Editors of the letters section speak eloquently of their democratic visions on the pages of *The Masthead*. They speak the language of deliberation, of civil conversation, and of public criticism.[14] In detailing their view of the section, most mobilize the phrase "public forum," or translate it into equivalent terms. While Rosenthal (1969) characterizes the page as a "debating society that never adjourns," Hynds, along with many others, cites it as a "forum for the exchange of information and opinion" (1994). Grey and Brown (1970) write about the letters column as a place to "stimulate public debate and discussion."[15]

Underlying most sketches of the page's role is the assumption that the page should operate on a “marketplace of ideas” model, with individuals' pro and con opinions printed next to each other on the page, and battling it out on the basis of the most persuasive argument.[16] Many editors explicitly characterize the page as a "marketplace of ideas," while others refer to it as a "community bulletin board" or a "mail bag."[17] What is obvious from these descriptions is the view of letters as *individualistic*, stand-alone products of people responding to newspaper content. It is a place for readers to "contact" the newspaper, on an individual basis, to express opinions for publication alongside those of others, rather than in dialogue with them (Kirwan, 1991).

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[12] See for example Peters and Cmiel (1991).

[13] Cf. Habermas (1995a, p. 103).

[14] The most common way of describing the letters feature is as a "reader's forum" (see for example Vandevander (1966); Hynds & Archibald (1996); Ciafalo and Traverso (1994)). Writers who wax poetic about the letters section employ an enormous range of metaphors, however. See for example Hynds & Archibald (1996), who speak of the "gyroscope function" of the letters page; the function of "bringing meaning out of the jumble of news and events."

[15] See also Davis & Rarick (1964), who propose that one "of the functions of letters to the editor in a democratic society is that of catharsis. The letter column gives the irate, the antagonist, the displeased a chance to speak out and be heard." An informal survey of letters to the editors features shows that the vast majority of them are headed "Forum" or "Public Forum."

Along the same lines, most editors' discussions argue that the public forum of the letters section belongs to the *newspaper*. Editors point to their own active role as the mediators of discourse, the providers of opportunities for expression. For example, Ryon (1992b) sees the feature as a space that "allow[s] our readers to participate in the public forum we like to think we offer." Or, as Clark (1990) phrases it, the op-ed page is "the people's page. It is the only place in the newspaper where "they" can speak to us, the only place an informed outsider is granted a forum."

By marking active citizens as "informed outsiders," Clark articulates rules of entry that are much more exclusive than Habermas' requirements for "competence" to participate, which includes merely the ability to act and talk. However, even with this narrow understanding of competence, the citizens remain "outsiders" to the rules and practices of the page: In loaning this forum to the readers/citizens, the *newspaper* chalks out the rules and principles of the forum. Hence, the editor, rather than the citizens of the public forum, is the one to determine the rules that govern access to the conversation.

At the same time, most editors also feel a genuine desire for democracy to do its work on the letters page. Towne (1976) argues that the letters page should provide a place for us to discuss "what we the people really are, what we think about, what we want and need." He suggests that the letters page should allow society its "right once in a while to provide and hold a mirror on its own...Who are newspapers, anyway, always to select the mirrors?"[18] In other words, this editor suggest that the page should move beyond the provision of a "marketplace," and toward allowing "society" to write the rules. Likewise, Clemon (1976) argues that the letters page is

> more than a hot readership item and more than an 'access' mechanism. It's a regional institution, combining some of the elements of the town meeting, the

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[16] See Foster & Friedrich (1937), whose content analysis reveals the alternation of letters for and against a particular news item.

[17] See, for explicit statements of this allegiance, Joyce (1990), who writes that her paper's "commentary page is a marketplace of ideas." Both Franklin (1988) and Ringham (1990) characterize the page as a "public bulletin board."

[18] Cf. also Winslow (1976), who refers to the letters page as a political "community art form," and Carter

> rural party line, the loafer's bench on the courthouse square, and the continuing referendum.

By calling for the letters section to take over the functions of the public sphere of yesteryear, Clemon identifies a multiplicity of roles for the newspaper in a modern democracy where political communication is structured by the constraints of mass mediation and the demands for profit-making. This problematic is captured in the statement of principles of the National Conference of Editorial Writers, whose members are responsible for editing letters sections around the country:

> Editorial writing is more than another way of making money. It is a profession devoted to the public welfare and to public service. The chief duty of its practitioners is to provide the information and guidance toward sound judgments that are essential to the healthy functioning of a democracy.[19]

The group does not deny the centrality of profit-making, but espouses its concern for democracy, and takes on the burden of aiding in the "healthy functioning of democracy." They assume that information and guidance -- like tangible commodities -- can be "provided" to citizens in exchange for money. It is, then, a top-down theory of truth which assumes that there is a knowable and objective reality of "information and guidance" that can be discovered and delivered by the authority vested in journalists, to the needy citizens. It is a process of information transmission, rather than collaborative conversation, and it is one that can be undertaken as part of a money-making enterprise.

Letters to the Editor as a Public Relations Tool

The twin commitments to democracy and profit-making are not necessarily in tension with each other in the ideology that underlies most editor's thinking about letters. Instead, the problem of balancing the two is solved once we can think of the letters section as a public *relations tool* for newspapers.[20] By providing a forum for citizens, the newspaper gains in popularity, circulation, and advertising revenues, the argument goes. Editors understand the pages as a public relations tool in at least three ways. First of all, it provides newspaper readers with a grievance route, or an opportunity for *individual* "catharsis."[21] It is seen a way to complain about the misrepresentation of their person, or

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(1992), who characterizes the page as the "strength of the community's heartbeat."

[19] This statement of principles is printed on the back cover of each issue of *The Masthead*.

[20] See also Liefer (1990), who speaks of the page as a "vehicle for intellectual transaction" between journalist and reader.

[21] Cf. Davis & Rarick (1964).

of current events.[22] For example, Rosenthal (1969) argues that "letter writing has obviously always provided a lot of people with all kinds of satisfaction, be it from an opportunity to engage in a form of individual public service, to enlarge one's ego -- or simply to get something off one's chest" (p. 116). The discourse resulting from such practices is based on the *individual* expression of opinion or grief. The conversation between citizens, and the process of listening and responding are subsumed to the provision of a "wailing place" open to all distressed individuals.[23]

This is what scholars have referred to as the "safety valve" function of the letters page: The paradoxical idea that the letters section may silence dangerously loud individuals by giving them the opportunity to vent their frustration.[24] In doing so, the newspaper makes way for an understanding of the public as a random and rambling assembly of isolated individuals.

The letters page also comes handy in the service of public relations by offering a strategy for increasing readership: Because it is one of the best read parts of the newspaper, it is, as Carter (1992) points out, a worthwhile investment in time and space.[25] On a similar note, the letters section enhances the newspaper's credibility in the eyes of readers, because it puts in place a mechanism of accountability for news content. Thus, DeLong (1976) characterizes the letters section as simultaneously a "democratic exercise" and a "watchdog over presentation."

Media institutions legitimate their practices by flaunting the image of openness, and also sell their "public forum" as a training ground for democracy. In other words, the letters section, though constructed as an exercise in public debate, can be seen as an arena for the enactment of the twin strategies of enhancing credibility and increasing circulation. Ryon (1992b) writes that the letters section "allow[s] readers to participate in the public forum we like to think we offer. This is good for democracy, of course -- to say nothing of circulation." Likewise, Cole (1992) suggests that "there isn't a better public relations tool than letters to the editor." In her view, newspapers need letters to "keep them and their communities in touch with constituents." Cole's statement, then, distinguishes between the newspapers' communities and their "constituency," or customer base. She draws up a model of the paper itself as something akin to a democratic community of elected officials, in a process of representation that involves citizen choice only through their decision to purchase as customers.

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[22] Cf. Cranberg & Stewart (1992); Barron (1967) about the importance of reply rights.

[23] See White (1968), who writes about the letters section of his paper, which is actually called the "Wailing Place."

[24] See also Romanow et al. (1981); Lander (1972) for a detailed discussion of the "safety valve" theory of the letters page.

[25] Cf. Bogart (1989). See also Hynds (1994).

Criteria for Selection of Letters to the Editor: The Rules of Relevance, Brevity, Entertainment, and Authority

The Right to Respond is Not a Right to Deliberate: The Rule of Relevance

When discussion takes place in the name of public relations, and when the newspaper emphasizes its ownership over the democratic purpose of the letters section, editors are in a position to use the pages for discussion of the *newspaper* and its content, rather than to encourage an ongoing critical discussion of affairs relevant to the community, premised on the ideal of universal access. It is worth noting that the nature of the letters section precludes, in practice, the kind of universal access that Habermas calls for: The public debate of the letters section is a *constructed* creature, pieced together by selected opinions and voices, rather than emerging spontaneously and uncontrollably. Letters editors, as the keepers of the public sphere, decide who gets access to the public forum; based on a range of criteria that make sense within the context of newsroom constraints, but get in the way of realizing the Habermasian ideal speech situation. Although the letters section can never approach the ideal of universal access, editors might come closer to constructing a democratic public debate if they take this ideal as a normative guidance for their action. However, the understanding of the letters section as, first and foremost, a site for discussion of the newspaper, owned by the media corporation and not the public, flies in the face of the Habermasian ideal: It is not seen as even potentially a universally accessible, egalitarian ground for discussion of topics of common concern, but as a place to *contact* the newspaper.

The recognition of what we might call the "contact" function of letters emerges as a pattern in editors' comments. Some of those who voice their concerns on the pages of *The Masthead* even speak of their letters feature as the only, and much-needed, site of communication with readers.[26] As Pritchard and Berkowitz (1979) argue, "letters may not be perfect reflections of audience opinion, but in the absence of better information, they may help journalists orient themselves to the concerns of readers."

Rather than being addressed as citizens, the readers of a newspaper are constructed as consumers, with the rights and disadvantages attached to that status. Instead of sharing concerns, then, the citizens of today's public sphere share with one another their purchase of the newspaper and the right to act, by writing letters, on the information provided in the newspaper. However, there is no agency for them to create their own opinion in common: They are individual information-shoppers who may complain about their purchases, but who are in no position to invent or create their *own* products. This philosophy assumes not a debating public, but a dormant audience of isolated individuals who refrain from reflecting on political issues until inspired by news content.[27]

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[26] Ryon (1992a).

The substantive result of this orientation is that the debate of letters sections arrives in the meager package of response to items already placed firmly on the agenda by the paper -- news items that are "relevant," or, as one of many editors phrase it, "important and topical" (Dix, 1968).[28] Studies indicate that the vast majority of letters reflect the issues of the front page and editorials, and some editors even institute a practice of only using letters as they refer to editorials or columns that have appeared on the op-ed page.[29] And though this satisfies one of the conditions of debate outlined by thinkers such as Habermas; that of providing content and context to moral debates, it does not allow for citizens to introduce their own ideas into the letters section; the agenda-setting that Schudson sees as crucial to democratic participation. At most, readers can be the "watchdogs" over a newspaper's point of view, barking out their dissent or consent to what is already present in the newspaper's self-styled "marketplace of ideas."[30] This marketplace is separated into distinct and isolated stalls of particular news items and editorial opinions. Hence, the "rule of relevance" sketches out the foundations for a model of debate which favors monologue because critical dialogue takes too long and requires too space in an always-already crowded marketplace. The rule of relevance, then, lets the newspaper, not the public, decide on the terms for debate. The ongoing consideration of common concerns that is the basis for democracy is easily dismissed as irrelevant and stagnant.[31]

The Rule of Entertainment

The mounting pressure to sell papers in a media marketplace that is increasingly driven by a paradigm of entertainment has left its traces on the letters section by generating a set of practices to add to the principle of relevance: The intertwining rules of entertainment and brevity.[32] What Streeter (1996) writes about the history of commercial broadcasting also rings true in the case of newspapers: "Much of the political legitimacy of commercial broadcasting rests on the principle of free speech, yet its all-embracing dependence on entertainment values appears to enfeeble the political dialogue that free speech is supposed to foster" (p. 10). When the democratic ends of media institutions become secondary to the commercial ones, the principle of deliberation is subsumed to the rule of entertainment.

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[27] Cf. Pritchard & Berkowitz (1979).

[28] See also Fretz (1988), who argues for the section to select letters that offer an "informed discussion of some very important issues."

[29] See Pritchard & Berkowitz (1979); Grey & Brown (1970); Romanow et al. (1981).

[30] Kapoor & Botan (1992).

[31] See Kapoor & Botan (1992, p. 6).

In an article that succinctly demonstrates the concerns of many letters editors, Kingsley Guy (1992) argues that he'd "rather see 10 letters of 100 words than four of 250." Guy contends that by enforcing a maximum limit of 250 words editors express their willingness to say no to "writers who think they have a God-given right to fulminate ad nauseam." "Hey, newsprint is expensive," Guy muses. "Newspapers are in danger of becoming irrelevant because they are failing to meet the amusing illustrations in the form of syndicated cartoons, and a more appealing format."[33] The basis for this editor's gripes with lengthy letters lies in the problem of keeping up with the competition in a media marketplace characterized by an emphasis on entertainment. He argues that newspapers "are in danger of becoming irrelevant because they are failing to meet the needs of the modern reader who seeks information in an easy-to-read format." This worry is echoed by other editors. They suggest the letters feature may be an endangered species because owners of newspapers fail to see the connection between its existence and commercial success.[34] In their view, the feature needs to move beyond the "bland, boring, and humorless" that merely provides a "grueling kind of sameness" (Phillips, 1990; Anderson, 1990). Newspapers can turn on readers by offering more sparkly, entertaining op-ed pages and letters sections. "We ought to be flame throwers; there are too many pilot lights that don't even singe your fingers when you touch them," offers one writer (Anderson, 1990). However, by throwing flames, the newspapers abandon any pretense of civility, and the presumption of rational discussion that underlies democratic speech as envisioned by Habermas. In its place, they institutionalize the coercive punch of hard-hitting entertainment that fires up readers, but offers no channel for constructive resolution of conflicts between divergent norms and opinions.

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[32] It is worth noting that not a single article in the 1968 *Masthead* Symposium on letters to the editor mentions entertainment as a goal of the letters page, whereas a large number of writers express such concerns after 1990.

[33] See also Bohle (1991; 1992) for a discussion of the centrality of an appealing format.

[34][34] Cf. Hynds (1994), which takes this statement as its vantage point, yet shows that most editors consider the section vital -- not for reasons of circulation, but civic duty. See also Hynds (1991); Kapoor and Botan (1992); and Yoakum (1971) for a discussion of the almost-universal 300-word limit.

The Rule of Brevity

In taking for granted the presumption of profit-making, newspapers get caught in the demand for digestible, entertaining information and are forced to chop up deliberation into bite-size debate. Most papers strictly enforce a 300-word limit on letters to the editor, so as to allow for the greatest number of individuals to voice their opinion. Though the rule of brevity has governed the letters section during at least the past 30 years, the demand for increasing the number of letters and decreasing the "bulk" of individual ones has grown stronger and stronger over time.[35] *USA Today*, the national newspaper at the forefront of print media's turn to appealing bite-size information, now cuts all its letters down to 100 words or less.[36]

The smaller the bites, the argument goes, the more of them we can swallow. This approach, then, protects the quantity of individual expression, rather than the quality and depth of argument. Ultimately, the rights of the individual, rather than the democratic community, are centrally at stake. The bite-size debate approach expresses the desire to hear the opinions of as many persons as possible, rather than encouraging citizens to arrive at their opinions together, through detailed discussion. The rule of brevity thus counteracts Meiklejohn's insight that "what is essential is not that everyone shall speak, but that everything worth saying shall be said" (1960, p. 25). Put differently, a model of bite-size debate transparently shows allegiance to a particular interpretation of the First Amendment: That the protection of the speaker's right to speak does not imply that the *content* of the speech enjoys any protection.[37] As Salmon and Glasser (1995) argue, producers of news "serve consumers (i.e., speakers serve listeners) through the demands and dynamics of the marketplace; any a priori requirement for content would violate the principle of individual autonomy" (p. 445). This means that newspapers put the premium on a diversity of names tagged onto opinions, rather than the opinions themselves. In doing so, they emphasize the self-interest of seeing one's words in print. What this approach ignores, however, is the necessity to transcend self-interest in favor of the *shared* interest that comes about when the variety of opinions are heard by empathetic ears. And if the quest for formulating a consensus based on the consideration of the views of everyone affected is thus abandoned, we also let go of the possibility to form a public opinion. If we are interested in representing the quantity of individuals, rather than the quantity of opinions, we place the burden on the minority opinions -- those who have valuable, but undervalued views will not have the same opportunity to voice their concerns in the letters sections as the voices of privilege; the voices of the majority who can flood the editor with contributions.

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[35] Cf. Dix (1968); Craig (1968), who both write in 1968 that, as letters editors, they limit contributions to 200 words.

[36] Personal conversation, May 26, 1998, David Mastio, editor of *USA Today*'s letters section from 1997 to 1998.

[37] See Salmon & Glasser (1995, p. 447).

Another implication of the 300-or-less word-limit, interlocking with the rule of relevance, is that it becomes all but impossible for newspaper readers to engage in nuanced deliberation: It is not feasible to develop more than a truncated discussion of a "relevant" issue, or fashion a personal attack or defense, in 300 words. Conveniently, the limit sets the stage for a discursive situation in which "the public is allowed to respond by acclamation -- or by withholding acclamation -- but the public is not expected to respond substantively and discursively" (Salmon and Glasser, 1995, p. 446).

The historical allegiance to a market-driven model of communication fits well with the recent, but pervasive ideology of sound bite news; or the move toward brevity and spectacle in broadcast news. In the sound bite democracy of today's election coverage, Hallin (1994) argues, "the public never has a chance to hear a candidate -- or anyone else -- speak for more than about 20 seconds" (p. 146). In losing the richness and nuances of argument, and replacing them by the spectacle of brevity, we lose the ability to judge for ourselves. We lose the *content* of expression, the basis for a thinking response. The twin tendencies of market allegiance and sound bite news combine to form a coherent ideology with its own language for talking about and justifying the emphasis on brevity and entertaining catchiness in selecting letters.

The Rule of Authority

Though editors readily acknowledge and describe the rules of selectivity discussed above, they deny any editorial bias toward particular opinions or individuals.[38] However, an examination of a fourth rule of selectivity; here referred to as the "rule of authority," reveals a subtle, but powerful proclivity for the words of authority. This rule is perhaps the most slippery one, since its existence is often denied -- and rightfully so: It is not based on a conscious choice, but is built into the structure of public debate. It has to do with selecting culturally specific forms of competence for participation in public conversations. This rule rears its head in two ways; one overt, and one covert.

The overt expression of the rule of authority lies in the preference for publication of the letters of authority figures; a practice that pushes aside any Habermasian concerns about "ideal role-taking," which necessitates the bracketing of one's status. For example, while Cawood (1976) argues against the publication of the words of "illiterates" and

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[38] Cf. Volgy et al. (1977); Buell (1975).

"madmen," Andrews (1968) shares his elation over the occasional "letter of unusual importance, particularly from a prominent person." This proclivity, then, emphasize the display of excellence in the letters section over the ability to transcend self-interest and social status. However, the frequency of such remarks has decreased as recent years have seen powerful counterarguments from those in favor of cultural diversity. Since 1990, none of the *Masthead* articles on letters to the editors have advanced this line of thinking. Instead, editors give evidence to their desire for doing away with the remains of the bias for the word of the powerful. DeLong (1976) argues that the letters "column should not be the preserve only of verbal sophisticates, whether they hunt on the left or the right." Likewise, Phillips (1990) believes that "robust discussion of public issues should characterize the editorial page. Who would live in a community where the only "facts" that could be expressed were those certified by a higher authority?...The challenge is to find new voices and to give space to people who are not just the easily recognized political and civic leaders."[39] In other words, concerns for diversity have become an increasingly central part of the editors' self-understanding, and have influenced their practices profoundly.

Nevertheless, the consensus of editors appears to be that the ideal contributor to the letters page is the "informed outsider." (Clark, 1990). To gain such status, as previously discussed, one needs more than the competence to speak and act that Habermas sees as the criteria of qualification. And herein lies the more covert and complex manifestation of the rule of authority: The desire for letters that adhere *to cultural standards of eloquence.*

The origins of this desire for eloquence, while residing in the nature of selective mass media, has found fertile soil in today's climate of commercial media operation. Daniel Hallin, in his book *We keep America on top of the world*, blames the demise of public debate on the professionalization of American journalism, which has come about as a direct result of media commercialization. "Professionalization," he argues, "transforms the nature of political discourse. It narrows discussion to questions of technique and effectiveness that can be approached with detached realism" (p. 33).[40] The ethos of expertise and efficiency that Hallin talks about has gradually made its way into the letters section of the paper, where editors measure up the writing style and eloquence of letter writers. Broadly speaking, editors are concerned with three different, yet intertwined kinds of "cultural competences," or knowledge of decoding and encoding practices: Spelling, grammar, and persuasiveness.[41] As Bohle (1991) notes, it is not enough to have things to say; one also needs a background of skill to say it. These competences are problematic for two different reasons. First of all, they exclude a large proportion of letter writers from getting their opinions published. Seamans (1992) writes that "though a reasonably literate critical letter is likely to be published, we publish only about half the letters we get." A study by Kapoor and Botan (1992) indicates that about half of editors use grammar as a factor in their decision-making. Although small papers accept up to 80% of the letters they receive, large papers are forced to scrap a much larger percentage. *The New York Times*, for example, picks only 6% of their letters for publication.[42] Secondly, and perhaps more seriously, the demand for competence excludes a large proportion of the public from participating in the process of letter-writing *a priori*. Tarrant (1957), in one of the earliest studies of letters to the editor, defined the letters section as "a public forum where the mentally acute and socially active citizens of the community argued their views in the interests of their fellow man." The arcane phrasing notwithstanding, many editors would probably agree with the bias toward "mentally acute" and "socially active" citizens.

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[39] See also Ringham (1990), who argues that the letters section "gives voice to people who don't usually have one, or who don't usually choose to use it," and Runyon (1990), who suggests that "op-ed pages should no longer be a matter of prestige, nor should they be a last bastion for elitist pontificating. At their best, they hold the pulse of the community and the region"

[40] See also Streeter (1996) for a discussion of the "corporate liberal" tendency to couch broadcasting policy

This bias reveals a contradiction in the rhetoric of the media industry: Despite constant calls for diversity on the pages of *The Masthead* and other trade publications, the logic of the marketplace requires an approach to the business of editing that effectively kills diversity. As Bourdieu (1984) points out, the knowledge of cultural practices, or "cultural competence" is closely linked to educational capital, measured by formal qualifications and social origin.[43] It is necessary to know the rules of the culture to play the game of democracy, and the access to these rules is restricted to those privileged by their backgrounds.[44] This means that the balance of the letters pages, despite a genuine desire for diversity, is skewed in favor of those with ample cultural capital: As most studies of letters writers indicate, the column is dominated by White, middle-aged and well-educated males who are firmly situated in a community and have the excess time and energy required for a commitment to political activism.[45] In the monologic understanding of democracy that undergirds this metaphor, it is not the quality of debate and the considered consent of all concerned which matters, but the spectacular show of individual

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questions in terms of technical problems.

[41] Bourdieu's term. See, for example, Bourdieu (1984, esp. p. 2).

[42] Cf. Rosenthal (1969).

[43] See discussion in Bourdieu (1984, Chapter 1, esp. p. 13).

[44] Borrowing from Bourdieu (1984), who speaks of "the game of culture."

[45] See for example Sparks & Perez (1991).

cultural capital. The subtle bias induced by the "rule of authority" points to the slippery nature of "competence" as a normative criterion for inclusion in public debate, and demonstrates the impossibility of entirely leaving social status out of the public forum: Competence is a culturally specific concept, and is closely related to social and economic privilege. Even if editors wish to include everyone in the discussion, regardless of their background, they cannot, under the current constraints of the newspaper, include those who lack basic competence. Thus, having high social status becomes an entrance requirement for the public debate.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The analysis of practices surrounding the letters to the editors section has demonstrated the insufficiency of the "marketplace of ideas" philosophy in providing the conditions for democratic deliberation. A reliance on a theory of self-governance that assumes truth is the result of individual consideration of isolated ideas, combined with the profit-oriented operation of media institutions, has resulted in the rise to prominence of the rules of relevance, entertainment, brevity, and authority. The practices create an exclusive forum that, despite the best efforts of editors, works against the diversity of democratic expression. Moreover, the operation of letters section of the newspaper indicates that rather than being a site of public debate, it offers a necessary mechanism of accountability and legitimation for the newspaper. The section represents the privatized understanding of public opinion as the sum aggregate of individual opinions: The idea that if we add up all individual gripes; we will understand how the "public" feels.

Only by transcending the ritual invocation of the public deliberation, to get to the actual practice of what such ideas preach, that can recover the voice of a debating public on the pages of our papers. To address our concern not merely with the words of the speakers, but with the well-being of the hearers, we need to articulate a conception of the media's role in a democracy that incorporates the presuppositions of Habermas' ideal speech situation. As Barron (1967) argues, creating "opportunities for expression is as important as ensuring the right to express ideas without fear of government reprisal" (p. 1654).

Habermas' model of the ideal speech situation provides a vision of communicative action that emphasizes dialogue and calls for the active participation of media institutions in providing opportunities for critical debate. When applied to the realm of letters to the editor, Habermas' work indicates that debate cannot flourish unless everyone affected by that debate can participate and voice their opinions. Hence, this application of Habermas' work points to the need for a sustained effort to seek out a diversity of voices. More than that, it shows the necessity for providing consideration to those who are usually left out of the debate because they lack the kind of competences requires to gain a voice. It calls for newspapers to not merely actively encourage, but also assist in, the representation of a diversity of opinions. Such action goes beyond publishing "both sides of an issue," and transcends the right to respond to *individual* attacks. It is a principle that challenges the rule of relevance and the exclusivity of the public forum, and takes apart the dominant right to be heard, in defense of the right to hear.[46] This right rests on the concern for the well-being of the democracy, rather than the rights of the individual.

Barron (1967) asks "what of those whose ideas are too unacceptable to secure access to the media? To them the mass communications industry replies: The First Amendment guarantees our freedom to do as we choose with our media. Thus the constitutional imperative of free expression becomes a rationale for repressing competing ideas" (p. 1642).[47] Nothing in our understanding of the free expression charges media with the task of *creating* conditions for speech. Acknowledging this shortfall would be a step toward changing the problems of public debate: Rather than continually enforcing the need to keep out the messy words of those who cannot write (or speak), we need to raise the question of how to *make* these individuals speak.

Ultimately, this discussion suggests that we ought to substitute the rules of relevance, entertainment, brevity, and authority by ones arrived at in common, by those affected by the discussion on the pages of the letters section. More than that, the implications of Habermas' work discussed in this paper point to a range of practicable and specific solutions to the problems faced by letters editors who are caught in the quagmire of the marketplace: Once we recognize that media have a normative obligation to be the catalyst, as well as the guardian, of public conversation, it becomes easier to envision some of the measures that may be taken.[48] While these measures might not do away with the *structural* forces that shape media institutions, they can move toward repairing procedures and practices; they can move toward realizing the Habermasian ideal speech situation.

Most simply, the editors who speak up in *The Masthead*, despite their loyal adherence to profit-making, almost unequivocally recognize the need for more letters space. A way of addressing the rule of brevity and the lack of space, then, could be to simply increase the number of inches and columns allotted to letters. To provide a workable solution, however, also entails a revision of the bite-size debate model -- it requires us to realize the necessity for longer and more detailed inquiry that can afford to be oblivious to word limits. Carter (1992) suggests that a "well-written, well-reasoned letter that is over your word limit can be used as a guest column." The practice of inviting community members into the pages and assisting them with the process of expression is a step in the right direction.[49] In particular, the conscious choice of guest columnists from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds could bring more diversity to the op-ed pages and provide an avenue of compensation for the unequal distribution of cultural capital. It could admit to the never-ending nature of conversation, and thereby challenge the rule of relevance.

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[46] Cranberg & Stewart (1992) discuss the issue of reply rights. For a more academic/legal viewpoint, consult Barron (1967).

[47] Cf. Barron (1967).

Some editors have addressed the problem of constructing the letters section as a vehicle for newspaper accountability and public relations. For example, Meyer (1968) relates how his newspaper offers two columns for the public. One, "Letters to the editor," allows readers to voice their grievances against and criticisms of newspaper content. The other forum, "Reader's exchange," attempts to provide a site for community debate that moves beyond responses to the news. This solution recognizes the philosophical line between newspaper accountability and public debate -- one which most editors easily blur. But it is also a difference which, as we have seen, brings out fundamental tensions in the role of today's mass media.

In her article "The great American tragedy: Few say much about anything," *Des Moines Register* editor Geneva Overholser (1992) calls for op-ed editors to stop being afraid of offending the public, and start digging for a diversity of viewpoints. Her words of caution are important to keep in mind before embarking on a journey of communicative renewal. She writes that "it will be rough and untidy, raw and fractious. Why, it'll be a veritable cacophony -- the sweet sound of democracy itself" (19). If the editors can extend this insight to the letters column, it might be possible to reconceive of the public without the suffix of "relations" and the hollow ring of the cash register.

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[48] The idea of the media as a "catalyst" for conversation is borrowed from Christians, Ferré, and Fackler.
[49] See also Kirwan (1991), who offers an elaborate and compelling suggestion for the model of the guest column.

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Reflecting the American Dream:

Walker Evans on 1930s Advertising

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Reflecting the American Dream:

Walker Evans on 1930s Advertising

> *Evans photography has colored all of our memories so that we can no longer separate our fact from his fiction, or vice versa.*
>
> *-- A.D. Coleman, 1971*

Considered one of the twentieth century's greatest artists, Walker Evans captured American culture, within its specific historical context, and brought an ethical sophistication to the nature of documentary photography. This quintessential American photographer shunned both artistic pretension and commercial acceptance, favoring instead, clear, direct, simple, and straightforward representations of industrial society which often illuminated the ironic potential of the American Dream. Preferring the sharp focus and exceptional detail of large format cameras, Evans used an 8x10 view camera, set at a small aperture, for much of his seminal work in the 1930s, shooting his subjects straight on, without sentimentality or commentary; it was a camera technique that matched the stark realism of his own way of seeing. "Sublimely simple, resonant, and profound" (Purvis, 1993, 52), the images of the most influential of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers ultimately changed the way generations of people perceived the United States. Evans was unwilling to create images to support the propaganda of a particular political or governmental perspective; distancing himself from his subject mater, he opted for a reflective, anonymous, almost disinterested stance, aimed at providing a historical record of what "any present time will look like as the past (Evans, 1982, 151). To this day, the purity and transparency of Evans seemingly effortlessness pictures, created without pretense or artifice, have helped to ensure their place as a primary source book for depression-era American history.

Scholars suggest that while Evans' individual photographs offer timeless depictions of American society, when the images are arranged sequentially, that the juxtapositioning of these pictures creates a variety of new relationships and meanings. In fact, the continued republication of much of Evans 1930s work, including the reissuing of two of his collections of photographs, *American Photographs* and *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, has introduced new generations to his photography and has prompted considerable scholarly attention. The fiftieth anniversary edition of *American Photographs*, published in 1988, continues the 1962, second edition tradition of dedicating the book to future generations, not only as a formative example of photographic art but also as historical evidence.

Assessing the unity and coherence of *American Photographs* as a "remarkable achievement" (Trachtenberg, 1989, 235), Alan Trachtenberg suggests that Evans struggles to define an alternative role for photography against prevailing artistic norms of the 1930s. J.A. Ward situates Evans' significant artifacts, characters, and experiences within the historical specificities of the southern region of the United States (Ward, 1985), while Lew Andrews reinforces the importance of reading *American Photographs* as a sequence of images rather than as a pictorial collection (Andrews, 1994). Although Evans' photographs for *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, written by James Agee, were taken in Hale County, Alabama, in 1936, Ken Takata emphasizes their continued ability, some fifty years later, to speak to audiences regarding fundamental issues in society (Takata, 1989). More recently, Paula Rabinowitz assesses the images and depression-era reportage of the text to interrogate sexual, class, and racial positions in bourgeois society (Rabinowitz, 1992), and Miles Orvell suggests that the documentary model Evans and Agee created still provides insights for future investigations of American culture (Orvell, 1993).

While assessments of individual book projects certainly reinforce Evans' position as a creative genius, this essay, however focuses on the advertising images Evans creates during the depression, a period generally considered his "most creative" (Trachtenberg, 1989, 245), as an information specialist for the Division of Information for the Resettlement Administration, later known as the FSA. Unlike other FSA photographers, who are willing to incorporate hope, heroism, and other humanistic concerns, at the request of the United States government, Evans keeps his emotional distance from his subject matter, and produces plain, uncompromising representations of depression-era culture. In a spring 1935 handwritten draft memorandum to the FSA, Evans insists that he must never be asked to create propaganda to support any governmental policy and explains that the value of his photographs, "lies in the record itself which in the long run will prove an intelligent and farsighted thing to have done. NO POLITICS whatever" (Evans 1982, 112).

In photographing a myriad of printed and hand-made signs, billboards, and posters, Evans suggests the ironic presence of advertising in twentieth century industrial society, particularly in his comparison of the actual living conditions with "public symbols of material power" (Ward 1985, 119). His emphasis on signs remains a constant theme throughout all of his photography, and in later years, Walker extends his interest to the actual collecting of logos, signs, billboards, and other advertising ephemera. While these advertising images certainly offer a critique of industrial capitalism, this essay suggests that they may also illustrate a "structure of feeling," a way of experiencing and understanding American culture in the 1930s, particularly as it relates to the development of advertising in contemporary society.

Raymond Williams conceives of structure of feeling as an attempt to distinguish the practical, evolving, lived experiences, within the hegemonic process, from the more formal fixed concept of ideology. In one sense, it represents the culture of a period, the actual "living result" of a particular class or society, which corresponds to the dominant social character; yet it also illustrates expressions of interactions between other non-dominant groups

(Williams, 1961, 63). A structure of feeling incorporates "meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt," particularly as they interact with and react against selected formal beliefs (Williams, 1977/1988, 132). It describes the tension between the lived and the articulated, and methodologically it provides a cultural hypothesis that attempts to understand particular material elements of a specific generation, at a distinct historical time, within a complex hegemonic process. Williams' suggests that when a culture's structure of feeling can no longer be addressed by its members, it can be approximated from a consideration of the society's "documentary culture," which includes all types of recorded culture such as photographs, novels, poems, films, buildings, and fashions (Williams, 1961, 49).

The artists' imagination is thought to transform specific ideologies and produce a specific response to a particular social order and an understanding which can be more "real" than ordinarily observable. For Williams, this sense of imagination allows a synthesis between the personal and the social that creates and judges a whole way of life in terms of individual qualities: "it is a formation, an active formation, that you feel your way into, feel informing you, so that in general and in detail it is not very like the usual idea of imagination ... but seems more like a kind of recognition, a connection with something fully knowable but not yet known" (Williams, 1983, 264-5). Evans' understanding of the actual role he plays in the creation of his own photography is similar to Williams' understanding of the artistic imagination. Finding his choice of subject matter less a conscious preference than a magical "irresistible tug from inside," Evans explains that, "It's as though there's a wonderful secret in a certain place and I can capture it. Only I, at this moment, can capture it, and only this moment and only me" (Evans quoted in Rathbone, 1995, 116).

It is not surprising that advertising images comprise an important component of Evans' photography. The son of an advertising executive, Evans learns the persuasive pull of advertising from his father who worked at Lord and Thomas as a copywriter for Albert Lasker, the dominant advertising personality during the beginning of the twentieth century and one of the first individuals to use mass psychology in advertising. In her biography of Evans, Belinda Rathbone notes that his home life was unhappy; his parents were estranged and his father was having an affair with their next-door neighbor and eventually moved in with her after she obtained a divorce. In an attempt to keep both families happy, Evans' father continually presented a false front to the world and, "As far as Walker could see, the American dream of a happy family life, one of the targets at which his father had learned to aim his subliminal advertising persuasions, was neither pure nor true" (Rathbone, 1995, 20). Perhaps Flaubert's description of advertising people as "noisy competitors with souls as flat as billboards" (Flaubert quoted in Rathbone, 1995, 30), may also have encouraged Evans' critique of the hand-maiden of material culture.

While the history of the dissemination of persuasive information may be traced back thousands of years, scholars generally agree that the formation of modern advertising emerges from specific characteristics and needs of corporate industrial capitalism, including a system of market control, an advanced distribution organization, and the development of consumer credit. From 1880 to 1930, such changes in industrial capitalism help to engineer the advancement of an organized system of persuasion and commercial information. By the end of the first World War, straightforward business announcements and crudely designed advertisements begin to give way to psychologically sophisticated campaigns, created by advertising specialists, that promote specific products and help to foster consumerism. Not surprisingly, by 1930s, advertising has become "capitalism's way of saying 'I love you' to itself" (Schudson, 1986, 232).

In modern advertising, it is never enough to sell a product; the acquisition of merchandise becomes associated with social and personal values and meanings. In one sense, advertising acts "as an agency of social control" (Carey, 1989, 23), encouraging individuals to follow prescribed social "norms" and consume products appropriate to the current economic and social conditions. Yet, it also "magically" convinces people that social needs and desires, such as love and companionship, are attainable through the acquisition of commodities, so that, for instance, by brushing with a particular toothpaste, an individual will ultimately be rewarded with his or her true love. As Williams explains: "If the consumption of individual goods leaves the whole area of human need unsatisfied, the attempt is made, by magic, to associate this consumption with human desires to which it has no real reference. You do not only buy an object: you buy social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment" (Williams, 1980, 188-189).

Stuart Ewen finds that modern advertising creates the "fancied need" which requires consumers to buy, not to quench their own needs, but in order to satisfy the "real needs of the capitalist machinery" (Ewen, 1976, 31). During the 1930s, advertisements begin to focus on "social insecurity" to sell products as well as consumerism; Ewen suggests that advertisements encourage self-conscious anxieties among people who are made to feel emotionally uneasy and uncomfortable (Ewen, 1976, 38).

An emphasis on "social insecurity" is the hard-sell tactic favored by advertisers during the depression as advertising revenues begin to fall from a 1929 $3.4 billion high to a low of $1.3 billion in 1933 (Fox, 1997, 118-119). In an effort to keep costs down, advertisers limit the use of illustrations and color, and appeal to consumers' personal insecurities throughout the use of sensationalized and threatening slice-of-life stories, gross exaggerations, extensive body copy, loud headlines, contests, prizes, and two-for-one promotions. Advertising appeals often focus on consumers' fear, guilt, and shame, violating prevailing standards of decency in their preoccupation with body odors, personal flaws, and job insecurity. During the 1930s, advertisers capitalize on wide-spread unemployment, favoring scare campaigns in their attempts to connect the use of their brand of razor blades, toothpaste, mouthwash, and stocking garters to job security. Advertisers also focus on parental guilt to sell such items as breakfast cereal, pencils, toilet tissue, and light bulbs. In 1934, advertising executive Bruce Barton suggests that, "ideals have been abandoned, standards have been sunk," and he warns that the proliferation of "silly advertisements, dishonest advertisements, disgusting advertisements" now discredit the business and put its practitioners on the defensive (Barton quoted in Fox 1997, 120.)

Convinced that the hard-sell approach helps encourage consumers to purchase products during troubled economic times, advertisers increasingly seek new outlets for their messages. Farm Security Administration photographs, including many taken by Walker Evans, document the intrusion of billboards and advertising signs on the social landscape of 1930s America. For example, local advertising agents offer, at no cost, to paint three sides of a barn any color requested by the farmer, if the agent can advertise his/her product on the side of the barn that faces the road. At the height of the depression, barns glorifying "Clabber Girl," the "Gold Dust Twins," and "Bull Durham" are found in every state (Goodrum & Dalrymple, 1990, 42).

Evans' photographic documentation of depression-era society often addresses the appropriation of consumer culture and suggests the ironies of depicting "a society of pleasure that is inseparable from the consumer society which gave it birth" (Mora & Hill, 1993, 34). Rejecting the commercialism, "slick technique," and saccharine romanticism of most American photographers, Evans offers the work of Eugene Atget, specifically his "lyrical understanding of the street, trained observation of it, special feeling for patina, eye for revealing detail" (Evans, 1980, 185), as an example of what photography should encompass. Overall, the key to Evans' photographic style is his ability to disappear into his work, to view American culture without appearing to comment on it. Preferring the term "documentary style" to "documentary photographer," he explains that "documentary is police photography of a scene and murder... That's a real document. You see art is really useless, and a document has use. And therefore art is never a document, but it can adopt that style. I do it" (Evans 1982, 216).

His anti-romantic way of situating American culture, within its specific historical moment, as well as his emphasis on visual and literary satire and illusion, resonates with the philosophies of two of his early influences, Baudelaire and Flaubert. From Baudelaire, Evans gains an understanding of the role of photography as a memory aid for the historical record -- as a "record-keeper of whomsoever needs absolute material accuracy for professional reasons" (Baudelaire 1980, 88). Always cognizant of Flaubert's strict adherence to realism, and his insistence on the objective treatment of his subjects, Evans maintains that he incorporates, "almost unconsciously," an understanding of the "non-appearance of the author. The non-subjectivity that is literally applicable to the way I want to use the camera and do" (Evans, 1982, 70). Alan Trachtenberg suggests that Flaubert also helps Evans to break from prevailing traditions and expectations, to see himself as an artistic rebel who would do for photography what Flaubert did for the novel: "With his eye for signifying detail, for the accidental revelations in juxtaposed objects, including written signs, and with his wit in laying one picture next to another, Evans set out to prove that apparently documentary photographs could be as complex as a fine piece of writing, as difficult and rewarding in their demands" (Trachtenberg, 1989, 240).

Trachtenberg emphasizes the literariness of Evans' photography and suggests that he evaluates his images based on the literary techniques of "eloquence, wit, grace, and economy," as well as "structure and coherence, paradox and play and oxymoron" (Trachtenberg, 1989, 241). For Evans, photography does not mimic literature, it is, in and of itself, a language, the "most literary of the graphic arts" (Evans quoted in Ware, 1993, 147).

Aware of the contradictions inherent in technological society, much of Evans' work emphasizes the exploitation of individuals by machines as well as the influence of mass produced goods and services on the quality of life for members of the working class. There is pessimism as well as humor in his depictions of technological progress, particularly when seen in the context of the actual living and working conditions of millions of Americans during this era. For example, in his photographs of the homes of miners in West Virginia, Evans contrasts the poverty and lack of material comfort with the opulence of advertising posters with which they decorate their living environments. While commercial images of Santa Claus and Coca Cola logos provide the predominant decorating touches, and comment upon the residents' inability to purchase the consumer goods which tempt them in these advertisements, they also represent the creative energy of these individuals. Echoing Williams dictum that: "Advertising is the official art of modern capitalist society. We put it up in our streets and fill our news media with it" (Williams 1980, 184), Evans' photography offers pointed examples, not only of how advertising blankets American culture, but also of how people appropriate specific offerings of advertising with imagination and creativity.

Lincoln Kirstein insists that Evans' work shows the eminent decay of industrial capitalist society, testifying to "the symptoms of waste and selfishness that caused the ruin" (Kirstein, 1988, 196); however, it is important to note that Evans' photography also includes an attempt to salvage, for future observers, a record of the beauty still found in society. Fascinated with classical architecture, Evans photographs decorative architectural details of Victorian houses in New England, as well as simple wooden homes, general stores, and gas stations found in small southern towns. While he exposes the poverty, dirt, and ruin inherent in many of these buildings, he also offers a glimpse of the functional beauty of commonplace objects. For instance, a 1936 picture of the kitchen wall of a sharecropper's home in Hale County, Alabama, shows a meager array of eating utensils, yet the composition of the image also showcases the ornamental aspect of the forks and spoons, and may be seen to pay homage to these workers "cultural energy and spirit" (Brierly, 1992, 43).

However, people do not play a central role in much of Evans' photography, which prompts some critics to suggest that not only does he breathe life into inanimate objects, but that he seems to care more about those objects than the people who produce and own them. But eventually, as Max Kozloff explains, "the rightness of this tone gradually sinks in on the viewer, who grasps that Evans aims to describe a broader spectacle, the diffusions of a culture in its material expression" (Kozloff, 1989, 116). The dominance of people, by inanimate cultural artifacts, permeates Evans' photography, and not only suggests the myriad of ways in which human beings disappear from the artificial images but also suggests how individuals have "abandoned their authority to the fabricated human beings of advertisement posters" (Ward, 1985, 128).

Evans' 1936 photograph of a roadside stand near Birmingham, Alabama offers a lighthearted critique of the domination of advertising in depression-era society (see figure 1). Two young salesmen are dwarfed by the myriad of all-encompassing signs plastered over the country store, promoting a variety of goods and services. While the signs advertise house moving and an assortment of types of fish for sale, the store displays fruit. The signs which promise reliability, honest weights, and square dealings dominate the scene and their promises seem to be reinforced by the boys holding melons. Yet, the young merchants seem to provide a secondary, almost subservient role to the larger inanimate advertising structure. The large painted fish at the top of the building has far more character development than either of the two boys and may be seen to represent a humorous commentary on the intrusion of advertising in American life. However, Evans notes that the comedy in his

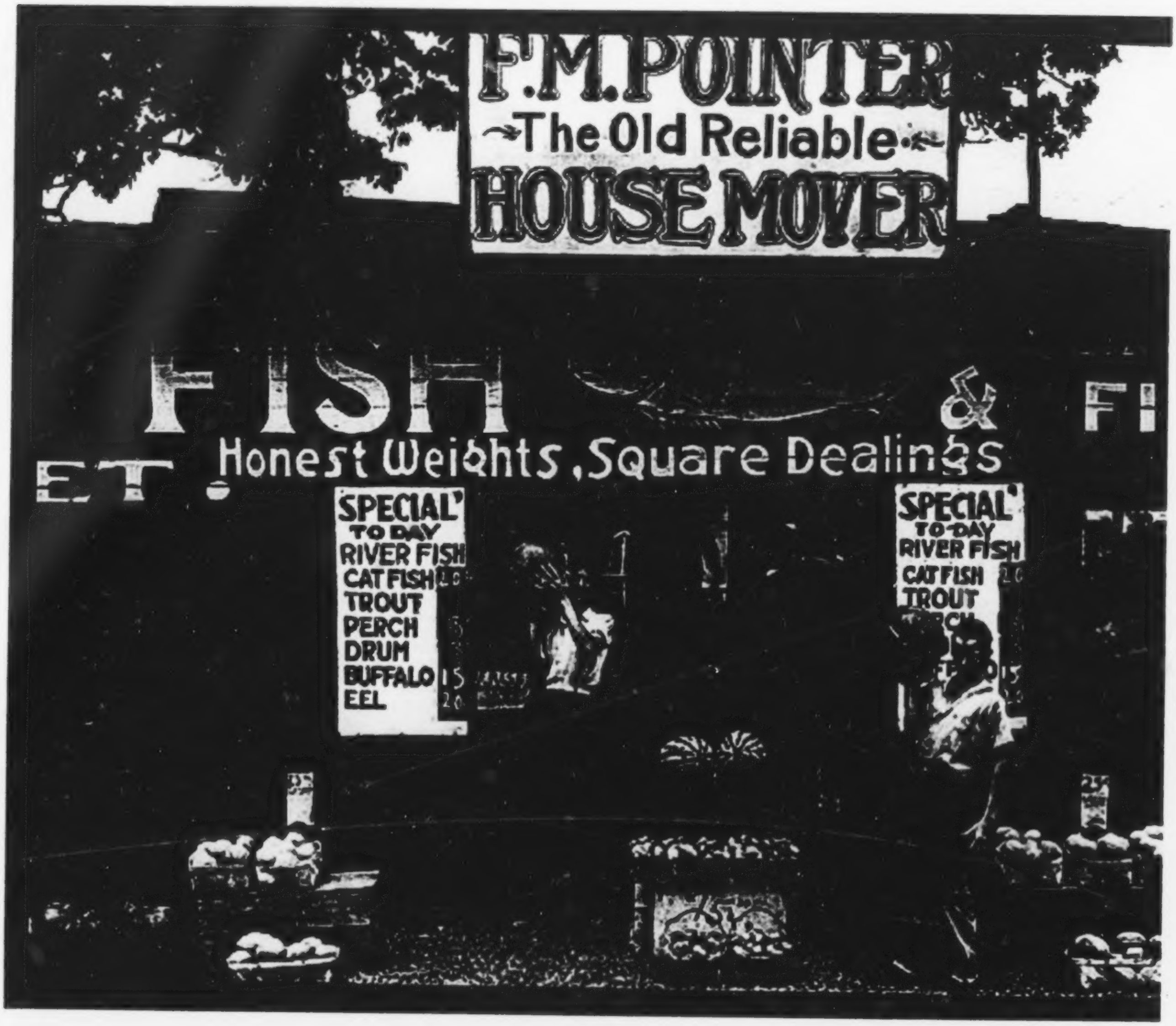
F.M. POINTER
The Old Reliable
HOUSE MOVER
FISH
&
FI
Honest Weights, Square Dealings
ET
SPECIAL
TO DAY
RIVER FISH
CAT FISH
TROUT
PERCH
DRUM
BUFFALO 15
EEL 20
SPECIAL
TO-DAY
RIVER FISH
CAT FISH
TROUT

Figure 1

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work may not be uniformly apparent and he suggests that some of his attempts to infuse humor into his photographs are missed because of the individual experiences and attitudes that some readers bring to his images (Evans, 1982, 33).

Favoring anonymous expression over the truth of portraits, Evans admits that he has no interest in photographing people as individuals, and says that human beings "interest me as elements in the total image, as long as they are *anonymous*" (Evans quoted in Mora & Hill, 1993, 260). Evans' 1936 photograph of a Birmingham photography shop, depicting two hundred twenty-five machine-made, small passport photos, carefully arranged in squares of fifteen, with the word STUDIO emblazoned across them, is but one example of how his work critiques stereotypical notions of portrait photography. The passport photos, identical in size and framing, are devoid of artistic sensibilities or individual subjectivity, and in one sense may be seen as "emblems of mechanical stylelessness" (Trachtenberg, 1984, 6). For Evans, the anonymous subject, created by an anonymous photographer, placed in the context of the cluttered landscape of industrial capitalism, are thought to reveal the naked truth about American society. Ultimately, an emphasis on cultural artifacts, produced by contemporary society, may show how the American Dream now translates into giving individuals only the choice and arrangement of inanimate, manufactured goods.

Evans photographs the ironic presence of advertising movie posters, billboards, and signs as their insinuate their way into the landscape of

American culture. Considering them essential manifestations of the logic of capitalist society, he suggests that even a frayed movie poster contains evidence of a specific historical place and time. For instance, Evans' photograph of a deteriorating minstrel showbill advertising J.C. Lincoln's Sunny South Minstrels, is at first glance, a cartoon-like characterization of African Americans, who are shown hanging out of the windows of a dilapidated house, running after chickens, and pouring water on musicians. Yet, not only does this image illustrate the ludicrous racial stereotyping pervasive in depression-era society, as well as the degradation of African Americans, but the decay of the poster itself also may be seen to create a horrific realization of the agony and violence inherent in American culture. The weather-worn poster depicts half-obliterated faces and disembodied hands that represent the frightening potential of annihilation and present a visceral documentation of specific material conditions. The photograph not only represents the history of the poster, what it originally was meant to illustrate, but it also indicates the current status of the deteriorating billboard which focuses on the pain and violence inherent in the image. The minstrel showbill photograph illustrates that while advertising signs from the 1930s are both familiar and ordinary records of society, when they are ripped out of their usual context, they may also confer essential clues about current issues in society.

A depression-era structure of feeling emerges from a photograph taken by Evans in 1936, depicting two symmetrically matching wooden frame houses, on a street in Atlanta, Georgia, each with oval-framed second story porches (see figure 2). The dreary, faceless, houses form a backdrop for the movie billboards which offer visions of celluloid romance and pleasure. One of the posters advertises Carole Lombard's new film, "Love Before Breakfast," and shows her gazing at her fans seductively, with a obvious blackened eye. This biting commentary by Evans, on the contradictions between the American Dream and the actual living conditions of the occupants of these two slightly sinister-looking houses, suggests what happens in an impersonal mass society, when people are often misrepresented on posters like glamorous film stars.

Interestingly, when confronting this image, viewers may be uncomfortably reminded that beautiful people are often "promoted by the ugliest and crudest of advertising displays" (Ward, 1985, 131). While Lombard certainly may be seen to represent luxury and material excess, the irony of this picture is heightened by her prominent black eye, which mirrors the houses' balconies and may symbolize the actual violence women often endure in oppressive relations. The photograph also includes an advertisement for Anne Shirley in "Chatterbox," reminding viewers, once again, of demeaning 1930s stereotypes of women promoted throughout the mass media. Read together, the two posters may also suggest that while women who talk too much end up with a blackened eye, this violence is necessary to put them in their place so that they are "prepared" to participate in an early morning interlude.

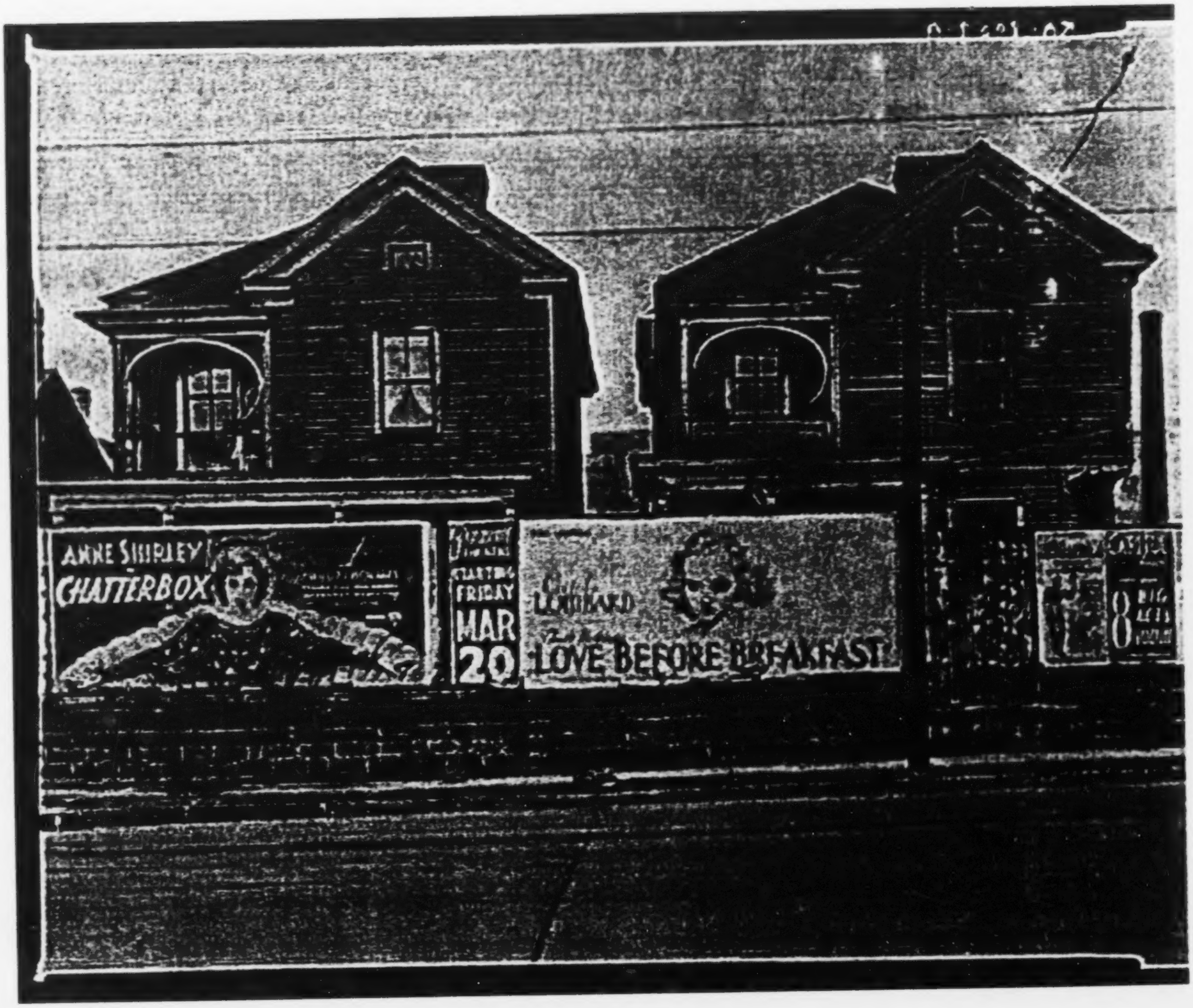
ANNE SHIRLEY
CHATTERBOX
STARTING
FRIDAY
MAR
20
LOMBARD
LOVE BEFORE BREAKFAST
8

Figure 2

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Crossroads store in Sprott, Alabama provides another example of the pervasiveness of advertising in 1930s American society (see figure 3). This image is one of many created by Evans that depicts rural post offices, stores, and gas stations. In each case, the buildings are simple wooden constructions, decorated with commercial advertisements -- most often for Coca-Cola. As places of communication, they illustrate how modern industrial society intersects with its agrarian roots. The barely distinguishable people, shown standing on the porch of the post office, appear as no more than decorative wallpaper. The emphasis is clearly on the giant Coca-Cola sign which obscures the identification of the building as a post office and serves as an ironic reminder of the role that the soft-drink plays in 1930s southern culture. Once again, the image reinforces the importance that advertising plays in depression-era culture, suggesting to readers the continued power of advertising, and also providing "a vision of the commonplace revealing its artlessness as art" (Hulick, 1993, 139).

Throughout Evans' work, representations of hand-crafted folk culture clash with images of machine-produced, standardized objects created by the culture industry -- Evans own description of advertising, as a "bastard trade" (Evans 1982, 74), may be seen to reinforce this conflict. Much of his photography emphasizes the creative visions inherent in the hand-made signs of independent business people, offering their artistic lettering and primitive imagery as expressions of their entrepreneurial drive and ingenuity. These signs are representations of a more innocent time, and are

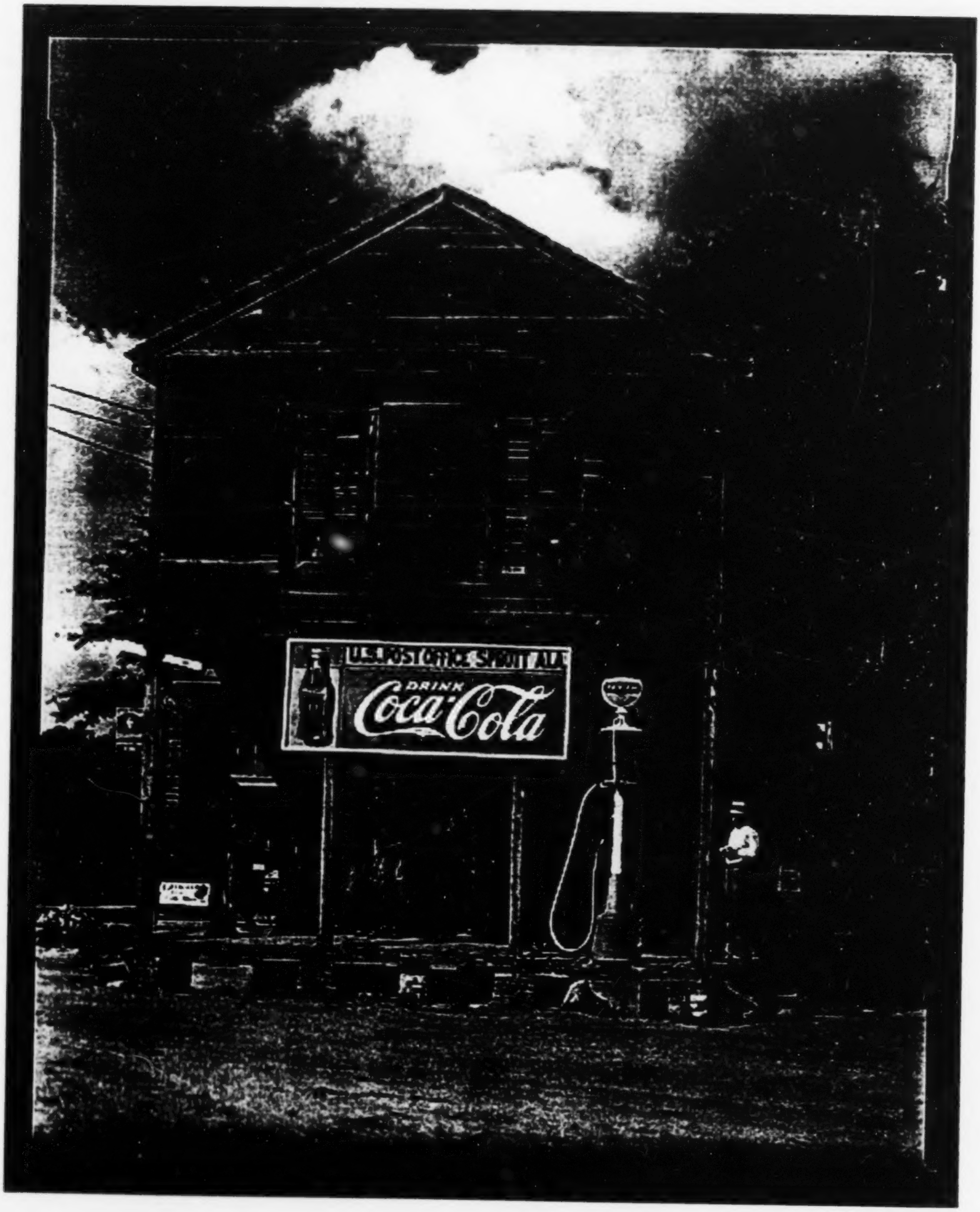
U.S. POST OFFICE SPROTT, ALA.
DRINK
Coca-Cola

Figure 3

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contrasted with an array of mass-produced advertising images which promote the consumption of consumer goods.

The photograph of Lincoln Market, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, created by Evans in 1935, provides an example of the conflict between individual creativity and industrialization (see figure 4). A hand-lettered sign on the side of a general store advertises meats and groceries as well as delivery services available. While this unsophisticated advertising display figures prominently in the photograph, so does the Coca Cola sign which frames the front door of the establishment and occupies an ownership role in this scene. No mater how much space is given to the independent business venture, it is clear that corporate capitalism will prevail.

The general store itself represents a place of social communication, a symbolic public sphere where people may gather to discuss issues of importance to the community. Yet, the concerns of depression-era society may be illustrated in the prevalence of advertising signs and posters. In this photograph, both the representations of a slickly-produced advertising logo as well as the hand-made market sign may be seen as essential components of public communication in 1930s America. That the signs occupy the entire image, and corresponding public space, may offer a clue as to what Evans considers the current state of communication. Echoing other depression-era critics, Evans suggests that industrialization, and its corresponding new media technologies, may in fact be destroying any real potential for actual communication. Overall, Evans' advertising photographs indicate that in

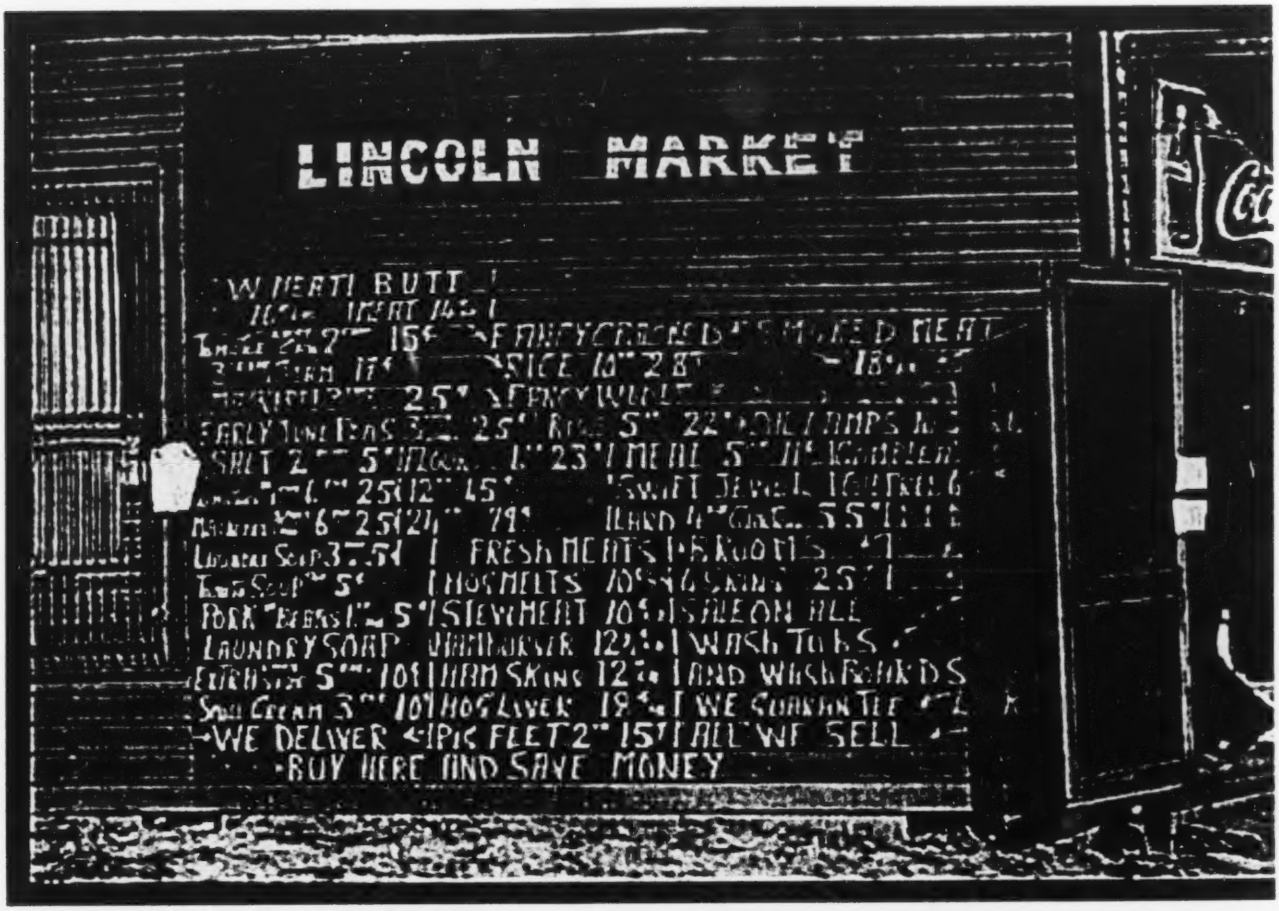
LINCOLN MARKET
W MEAT BUTT
FANCY CRACKED SMOKED MEAT
RICE 10 lbs 28¢
EARLY JUNE PEAS
OIL LAMPS
SWIFT JEWEL
LARD
FRESH MEATS
LAUNDRY SOAP 3 for 5¢
TOILET SOAP 5¢
HOG MELTS 10¢
PORK & BEANS 5¢
STEW MEAT 10¢
SALE ON ALL
LAUNDRY SOAP
HAMBURGER 12½¢
WASH TUBS
HAM SKINS 12½¢
AND WASH BOARDS
HOG LIVER 19¢
WE GUARANTEE
WE DELIVER
PIG FEET 2 lbs 15¢
ALL WE SELL
BUY HERE AND SAVE MONEY

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Figure 4

modern capitalist society, signs, slogans and logos, catch phrases, and visual metaphors may soon replace independent analysis and rational thought.

Throughout his career, Evans continues to "lean toward the enchantment, the visual power, of the aesthetically rejected object" (Evans, 1982, 220), photographing and collecting billboards, advertisements, logos, and "no trespassing," "no hunting," "no fishing," and "one way" signs. Shortly before his death in 1975, he indicates that signs are now his primary focus and admits: "I find that I do signs whenever I can find them. I usually swipe them too; I've got a wonderful collection!" (Evans quoted in Purvis, 1993, 54). Ultimately, Walker Evans offers readers an understanding of the prevalence, power, creative potential, and influence of advertising in 1930s American society as well as an understanding that advertising's current colonization of both the public and private realm, is an extension of "hard-sell" advertising techniques instituted during the depression. His photographs provide historical evidence as well as ideological observations on living and working conditions for many Americans during the 1930s and they also illustrate a structure of feeling regarding the pervasiveness of advertising and its specific practices during this era. Evans' focus on signs and advertising may appear to promote the easy access to consumption, yet his work does not depict a society of affluence, but instead it illustrates how advertising "magically" creates the appearance of plenty through the repetition and arrangement of objects.

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